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"SURE, IT WAS YOU DONE IT, YE BLA'GUARD!"

OR,
BICYCLE BESS
THE
Boulevard Belle Detective.

BY J. C. COWDRICK.
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE ST. NICHOLAS AVE. NIGHTINGALE.
It was one of the richest and roundest
voices imaginable.

The full tones poured forth with a smoothness that was attractive, and the voice had a fine flavor of Ould Ireland, by way of spice.

The song was nothing classic; it was only one of those popular airs that now and then catch the masses and are heard throughout every city and hamlet in the land.

Passers-by along the street stopped to listen, and strangers wondered where the singing was, for no one could be seen who appeared to be making any vocal effort. There was nothing but a high board fence at the corner, reaching from a new and elegant building on the one hand to an older yet somewhat pretentious structure on the other.

It was in that section of the city where the march of improvement is rapidly progressing, yet where even now the old almost predominates, here and there. On the one hand are seen elegant structures and fine pavements; on the other the old-style homes of generations past, behind which are the rugged, sloping hillsides, just as they were left when Nature finished her work and pronounced it good.

The section referred to lies above One Hundred Fifty-fifth Street, New York, though one need not go as far as that to find examples of what we are about to depict in words.

The particular spot need not be designated.

Whoever the singer was, it was evident that she was unconscious of the notice she was attracting, or else, knowing it, was doing her best to hold her audience.

There was quite a little knot of people at the corner, most of whom had solved the mystery, but every recruit was puzzled at first, the same as those before him had been, and generally it was by asking the question that they were enlightened.

In the crowd were several bicyclists.

"What is the excitement here?" inquired a wheelman who had just stopped.

He was a stout, athletic fellow, clad more for comfort than for show, as were most of those who, like him, had their wheels at hand.

"Listen, and you will know," some one answered.

"Dannie Murphy's daughter Nell—"

And the voice sprang into the chorus with full vigor and without effort, sending forth notes that many an amateur opera singer might envy, while the audience admired.

"Oh! you are listening to the mocking bird, are you?" the new arrival remarked.

"That's what she is," from another wheelman. "With training of the right kind, that girl has a fortune in her voice. But, where is she?"

"Don't you know?" asked the newcomer.

"I take it she is behind the fence; but, why is she singing there?"

"Come here and let me show you," said the new arrival. "You will get a peep at the girl, perhaps."

"You know her, then?"

"Oh, yes."

He pressed out of the crowd and to the corner, taking his wheel with him, and the other followed his lead.

But even there nothing was to be seen at first, and it was not until they passed down a section of the board fence that they found an opening. There one section of the fence, or one end of the section, more properly, stood in about two feet from the line.

Looking in, they beheld a typical home of the "squatter sovereignty," so called.

There, on the bare rocks, stood a house, a structure of one story, and that story not so high as the fence that had been built around the humble dwelling.

It was a dwelling of almost indescribable architecture. It was not of any of the recognized classes, ancient or modern, but was peculiar to itself. It seemed to have grown by stages, as the family had increased in size, until there had come to be accommodations for all.

It looked like what might have been attempted by a company of large school-boys in the way of a playhouse of more than ordinary size and importance.

And there was the singer.

On the rear "piazza" of the shanty, the top of which gave her just room to work, was a rosy-cheeked Irish girl.

She had her sleeves rolled up above her elbows, and was bobbing up and down over a steaming washtub, singing away while she worked, and evidently as merry as a lark.

She was of full flesh, and looked a picture of health and strength. Her hair was coal black, her eyes and brows the same, while her lips might have rivaled twin cherries of brightest red. Her complexion was one that any woman in "upper circles" might envy.

About the time the two wheelmen looked in at the opening the singing ceased, and the girl stooped and entered a door near at hand.

"Scott! but she is a beauty!" one of the wheelmen exclaimed.

"A beauty of her kind, you are right," the other agreed. "We call her the St. Nicholas Avenue Nightingale."

"You know her, then?"

"Oh, yes; after a fashion. I pass the time of day with her."

"Looks to me as if she is out of her station, here. Beauty like hers was not born to blush unseen."

"Better here than in a worse place, as perhaps you will allow. But, she takes her outings on Sundays, and is the belle of the Fort George resorts, when she is togged."

"I don't doubt it."

At that moment the girl reappeared, and happening to look in the direction of the fence opening, saw the two wheelmen.

A flush of indignation came over her face for one second; but, recognizing the one who had laid claim to having a speaking acquaintance with her, she smiled and gave him a nod.

"Introduce me," requested his companion.

"Can't very well do that, seeing that I do not know you myself," was the reply.

"My name is Phil Dixon."

"I have no reason to doubt that, but I can't introduce you. I would not introduce any one to that girl, without knowing him well."

"Whew! you are mighty particular, it seems to me. What is she, anyhow? One would think she was in society, and that we had to stand on ceremony in our approaches."

"I do not know that she is not as good as the best of them, only that she is poor and ignorant—two unfortunate accompaniments to beauty. Good-morning, Molly," as the girl came forward, wiping her hands on her apron as she came.

"No need to ask how you are."

"Good-mornin' to ye, sor," was the response, offering her hand with an exposure of as plump an arm as one would wish to see. "It is well enough Oi am, and Oi hope it is the same wid yersel'."

"Very well, I thank you. Do you know you have quite an audience outside the fence here?"

She flushed.

"Sure, can Oi help it?" she demanded. "Av dhey are foolish enough to be afther stoppin' to listen to my schreechin', dhe more fools dhey, says Oi. Is it a friend av yures, Mr. Bu—"

"No, I do not know the gentleman," was the reply, spoken before the name could be uttered in full.

"My name is Phil Dixon, Miss Molly," said the other, lifting his cap and bowing. "I was charmed with your singing, and wondered whether it was a girl of flesh and blood or an angel, as I could not see you. You have a charming voice."

"Bah! go along wid ye fur blarney! Sure, ye have found out it is no angel Oi am."

"I am not so sure about that—"

"No more av it, now, sor. Sure, and Mike was to hear ye a-talkin' to me loike that, it was takin' offense at ye he would be."

"I do not know who Mike may be, of course, but if he is your lover I would think he would be pleased to hear you honestly praised. What do you say to it, friend?"

This to the wheelman whose acquaintance he had made.

"If you will take a friendly word of warning, you will not wait around here to see how acceptable it will be," laughed the other. "Mike is a bad boy with his fists, and Molly here is the apple of his eye. Well, good-day, Molly; go on with your washing."

"Good-day to ye, Mr. Buckley. My respects to Mike, and ye sec him. Don't ye forget."

"All right, Molly."

"I think I'll remain a moment longer and see the play of those plump arms in the tub again, and hear another verse of your song, Miss Molly," said the young man who had given his name as Dixon.

"Ye will throt roight along about yure business, is phwat ye will be doing," cried the girl, with a show of spirit. "Av ye don't, sure it is a dipper av hot wather straight from dhe boiler ye will be gettin', d'ye moind. Dhis is not a side-show and Oi am no frake!"

CHAPTER II.

CACTUS BILL'S BETTER.

Sam Buckley laughed heartily, and his companion beat a retreat.

"Scorcher Sam" was well known to Molly McGee, and was well established in her good graces.

The other, however, was a stranger, and not even vouched for by Sam. He met with a proper reception for his advances.

"Ginger!" he exclaimed, "but she has a temper of her own, I see. I hardly think I will tarry to witness anything more of her performance."

"And you will do just as well not to come fooling around here," advised the Scorcher. "You have no call to be offended for my not introducing you; I couldn't do that."

"Oh, that is all right, of course; but I thought you would do it for a joke, being a fellow wheelman. Was not aware that you were really a friend of the family when I asked it. I gave my real name, though, so it was on the square, you see."

"And you have heard my name mentioned, so we are even. I see the crowd has dispersed, which will save me the trouble of moving them on."

"Save you the trouble—What do you mean?"

"I am a bike cop, is all. Had no business to tell you that, I suppose, but it slipped out. No harm done, however."

"And she called you Buckley—Is

it possible that you are the chap they call Scorcher Sam?"

"I am the fellow; but don't let it out. I have got business up here on the hill. Were you going in that direction?"

"Yes, and I would like to lead you a scorch over Washington Bridge, just for the fun of it. I have come up here on purpose to try that piece of road. I hear it rides like a carpet."

"Don't try it while I am in sight anyhow," laughed Sam. "I would be under the unpleasant necessity of taking you in if you did."

"Then I'll wait till you are out of sight, if that is the case."

They had now turned into Amsterdam avenue, and continued on in company as far as 181st Street, where Dixon took leave of his new friend and turned in the direction of the bridge.

Scorcher Sam continued on to the top of the hill at 190th Street.

From this section had come many complaints respecting a certain gang of toughs who made it their stamping ground.

Nothing serious had been charged, but many petty annoyances, yet no policeman in uniform had been able to happen on hand at a time to witness any of the minor misdemeanors and make a capture.

The east side of the avenue, along there, is given over to small stands, small amusements, and fakirs. It reminds one of a Coney Island in miniature, with its many cheap attractions, and at one point a tent under some trees bore this sign in big letters:

CACTUS BILL'S CIRCUS.

The tent was of fair size; there was music within; before the opening a typical Western sport was pacing up and down, and haranguing the passers-by to entice their patronage. He was a tall, well-formed fellow, with long hair, big hat, and a short, fancy coat, with a gaudy Spanish sash around his waist. He had strong features and a big mustache.

At the top of the hill Sam had stopped, and after viewing the splendid scenery for a time, though it was neither new nor novel to him, started down in the direction he had come, now walking.

In front of Cactus Bill's tent he stopped. "Walk right in and prove the truth of my statements, ladies and gents, and get your money back if it is not just as represented," the Western sport was saying. "Only a dime, and your wheel checked free while you see the show. The next act is to be pistol sharp-shooting, and you are just in time to see it. Nothing like it to be seen out of the wild and woolly West."

Scorcher Sam had certain instructions respecting some of the shows along the avenue, and putting his wheel in a rack that stood near at hand, he paid the admission and entered.

The interior of the tent was roomy, and at its rear end was a small stage.

Quite a number of persons had entered, and presently a bell tinkled, the curtain was drawn aside, and a young woman appeared.

She was clad in fancy costume, and carried in her hands a number of glass balls, which she laid on a stand in front of her and made her bow to the audience.

She was quite dark, and evidently Spanish or Mexican.

Having made her bow, she took up two of the balls and began tossing them in air from hand to hand, first right, then left, then passing them closely in mid-air.

This for a few moments; then she added a third ball, varying the perform-

ance to suit the number; then a fourth ball, then a fifth, then a sixth, keeping them all in motion with a steadiness and regularity that was surprising to many who saw it.

Then the sharp crack of a pistol was heard, and nearly every woman under the canvas uttered a scream. The topmost ball at the moment was shattered to fragments, but the girl kept the others steadily going, merely changing to suit the number of balls that remained to be handled.

Those who looked in the direction whence the shot came saw there Cactus Bill, smiling and confident.

He had a revolver in each hand.

Presently came two more shots in quick succession, and two more of the glass balls met the fate of the first.

This left but three, and one of these was quickly picked off with a shot, and after that two shots fired at the same time disposed of the other two together.

The rest of the performance was varied; but enough has been told for our purpose. The alarm the first shot created had passed away at once, of course, and after that the performance was thoroughly enjoyed until finally the young woman made her bow to retire.

Just as she was in the act of bowing she was seen to start; the smile left her face instantly; and with a cry she leaped forward to the edge of the stage, pointed in the direction of the entrance, and cried:

"There he is! I would know him among a thousand!"

A man had just entered, and he stood staring, his face the hue of death, almost.

Scorcher Sam was on his feet at once, at the first sign of the young woman's emotion, and was within a yard or two of Cactus Bill when he wheeled to face the entrance.

Cactus Bill still had his revolvers in hand, and the Scorcher, not knowing what was coming, leaped forward within reach.

"You are sure?" the sport asked, turning to the girl on the stage.

"Yes! yes! See his white face, the color of his coward's heart! It is Louis Murrill; I would know him even in another world!"

She spoke in English, but there was a foreign accent that was as pronounced as her color.

This had occupied but a few seconds.

A moment's pause, a desperate look around, and the man at the entrance turned to run.

"Stop!" cried the showman, lifting his revolvers. "Stop! or I will drop you in your tracks, Louis Murrill!"

But, the man did not stop; a couple of strides would carry him out of range, and he meant to take the desperate chance—scarce one in a thousand.

The revolver in the sport's right hand came up to the level and its report rang out just as the man was disappearing, but the aim had been disturbed, and the bullet went wide.

Cactus Bill wheeled and faced Scorcher Sam furiously, his eyes fairly burning.

"Why did you do that?" he cried.

"To save you from doing a murder," was the cool answer.

"And allowed a worse than murderer to escape! Out of my way!"

"Not in your present frame of mind. I will undertake to capture the man, if he has committed a crime, but I can't allow you to shoot him as you intend."

"Out of my way, or the worse for you!" and the typical Western sport took a step backward and raised his weapons; but, in the same instant, the Scorcher grabbed him by both wrists.

The greatest excitement prevailed, the women were inclined to scream, and all were crowding toward the entrance. Scorcher Sam and Cactus Bill were carried in that direction by force, the latter in a towering rage, and the former trying to calm him.

The young woman had disappeared from the stage.

CHAPTER III.

SCORCHER SAM SCORCHED.

Cactus Bill had met a surprise.

The scorcher was holding his wrists with apparent ease, though the sport was a powerful man.

The Westerner had no small opinion of his own prowess, and with good reason, but here he had evidently met his better, for Sam Buckley was a trained athlete.

"Unhand me!" the sport panted.

"If you promise not to shoot, I will," said Sam.

"That man must not escape, I tell you!"

"I am willing to help you take him."

"Who are you?"

"A police detective, and you can thank me for saving you a sitting in the death chair. You certainly meant to shoot to kill."

"No, you mistake; that would have been poor revenge. But, I did mean to bring him down with a bullet, so that he could not get away. Expert as I am, I could have done it without danger to any one else."

"I can well believe that."

Sam had released him, now, and they were hastening out.

They came out into the open space between the front of the tent and the sidewalk, to find already there the young woman who had juggled the glass balls on the stage only a few minutes before. She was pointing down the street and calling upon the people to stop the man who had escaped.

"There he goes!" she cried, on seeing Cactus Bill. "He will escape us! I know he will escape us!"

"Not if I can help it," answered Scorcher Sam. "Where's my wheel?"

"But, he is on a wheel—don't you see?" cried the girl.

"And I believe it is mine!" cried Sam, looking where he had left his "bike."

"It is, by Jupiter!"

"He has taken your wheel?"

"Yes; and I'll never catch him in the world, if he is an expert rider, with that wheel!"

"Here, take another!" urged Cactus Bill, quickly. "Take your pick of the lot; I will stand the damage, whatever it may be. No time to fool away."

The Scorcher made a hasty choice, mounted the wheel, and was away in pursuit of the fellow.

He had a personal interest in the matter, now.

The fellow had a long lead, and was wheeling at a good pace, and by the way he followed the iron plating under which lay the railway cable Sam knew he was no novice, and Sam felt misgivings about securing his wheel again.

He admired the fellow's selection, which was a further proof of his being an experienced wheelman.

It might have been by chance that he had taken the largest wheel and highest gear of the lot, but it looked otherwise. There was only one hope for the detective, and that was to gain ground before he was discovered.

So, away he went.

It was down hill, going in the direction of High Bridge Park, and other wheel-

men and wheelwomen were going in both directions.

They were not numerous, however, for Amsterdam is not so good a speedway for bicycles as the boulevard or West End avenue, the next thoroughfare to the west. There were enough for the Scorcher's purpose, however.

That is, when the man he was after turned around, as he presently did, he saw nothing to alarm him, for his pursuer was only one of several wheelmen and did not seem to be making any especial effort. Further back, on the hill where he had started, he saw quite a crowd.

As soon as the man looked ahead again, Sam let out speed and crept up.

He wondered where he had seen the man before.

The face he had seen somewhere, and recently, but evidently it had not impressed itself upon his memory to any great degree.

Still, he had seen the man somewhere, or one who looked like him, and he wondered who it could be. He meant to know, if he could gain a little more ground before the fellow took alarm.

At 181st Street the man turned to the left.

Either a knowledge of the city, and a definite idea as to where he wanted to go, or, and more likely, as Scorcher Sam believed, the beautiful pavement of the bridge had caused him to turn.

Washington Bridge, beginning just here, has a pavement as smooth as a floor.

As he turned, the man looked back.

Sam was now close upon him, coming at good speed, and the fellow took the alarm.

The bridge was almost clear, having but few persons on it at the time, and the man, with a look of alarm, applied himself to his pedals with vigor, and was off like a shot.

The Scorcher buckled down to the pursuit.

He had discovered that the wheel he was on was a speedy one, but he knew, of course, that it was not equal to his own.

If this stranger was near his equal as a rider, then the chance for overtaking him on that mount was slim indeed. Nevertheless, Sam meant to keep him in sight, at least.

It was as he feared.

They had gone but a little way when Sam found his own wheel was gaining and that he was being left in the rear.

He pedaled "for all he was worth," but it was of no use, and he knew it, so he called out for the fellow to stop and surrender, or take a bullet.

The threat, however, only seemed to increase the other's efforts to get away, and he went spinning along over the smooth bridge floor at a rate of speed he had probably never attained on a bicycle, for, as explained in a preceding story, the wheel was a special, made to order.

Hundreds of my readers, doubtless, have never seen New York, and hence have no idea of Washington Bridge. It is 2,400 feet long, to say nothing of the approaches, and is 80 feet wide; hence it is an excellent place for a trial of speed—when the police are not on hand. The height of the bridge is 135 feet above tide water.

Seeing that no notice was taken of his command, further than to show intention of defying it, the Scorcher fired a shot—fired in the air, of course.

But the only effect was to spur the fellow to greater effort.

It caused the few pedestrians on the bridge to stop and stare, and awakened their interest immediately, of course.

Evidently the man felt confident that Sam would not fire at him, taking the risk of killing some one else in doing so, for he certainly showed no signs of stopping.

Sam shouted once more, and fired again, but the man bent lower on the wheel and gave no heed.

Just then Sam saw another wheelman coming in the opposite direction.

He recognized that other at sight, and, at the same instant, remembered where he had seen the face of the man who had appropriated his wheel.

These two men looked very much alike, so much so that, meeting them apart from each other, Sam would have found it difficult to say which was which. Seeing them together, he might distinguish them easily.

Sam fired again, and motioned for the on-coming wheelman to intercept the man he was pursuing.

Although only a few moments had elapsed since the man in the lead had turned onto the smooth bridge pavement, yet they were already nearly across.

The wheelman coming from the opposite direction saw the signal and evidently understood it, for he proceeded to put himself in the way of the flyer on the detective's wheel, who shouted for a clear road.

The other dismounted and signalled him to stop.

A glance back showed him Scorcher Sam bearing down upon him, and not only so, but now a policeman, who had suddenly appeared from somewhere, was also shouting and motioning for him to stop, and stop he did. He slackened his speed suddenly, leaped off, and ran for a stairway that was near at hand leading down to the street far below.

CHAPTER IV.

SCORCHER SAM SLIGHTLY PUZZLED.

Policemen are a grand institution.

It is difficult to imagine what a city would be without their controlling influence.

At the same time, they are only human, and far from being infallible, and it now and again happens that one of their number makes a mistake when his intention is all right.

The policeman in this instance made a serious mistake.

He thought the two coming from the west side of the river were two scorchers trying the merit of their wheels on the hard and smooth bridgeway.

Having just come up from below, he had not seen the shooting, and if he had heard the shots at all could not tell from what direction they came. He took the fellow coming from the east side for an officer in citizen's dress.

With this misconception, he braced himself in the form of an X and motioned with his club for Scorcher Sam to stop.

He meant to make a capture.

"Out of the way!" shouted Sam. "Catch that other fellow!"

"Stop!" yelled the officer. "You are riding out of speed, and I am going to arrest you! Stop!"

This Sam was forced to do, or take the risk of a broken neck; so he slackened his speed immediately, but at the same time called out:

"That other fellow stole a wheel! I am after him! I am a bike cop in citizen's dress!"

"Stop a bit till I see what ye are," ordered the policeman.

Sam had to stop, but, the moment he was on his feet he showed his badge, saying:

"Confound it! you are allowing that

fellow to get away from me! I am one of the police force myself! After him, and see if you can't scoop him in. He stole my wheel!"

"Well, how was I to know?" demanded the officer, a little crestfallen over his mistake. "If you had been in uniform, with your badge in sight, I would 'a' known ye."

"Yes, and so would he. Here, mind these bicycles, if you are not going to chase him. Wait here a minute till I come back, Mr. Dixon," to the other, who had just then come up.

"All right."

With that, Sam made a dash for the stairs, which wound by easy stages down to the street.

Once below the body of the bridge, he looked this way and that for the man, but he was nowhere to be seen, and Sam wondered where he could have disappeared to so quickly.

Some men were working among the grass plots and flower beds around the bridge abutments, and he called out to them:

"Hello, there!"

They looked up at once.

"Did you see a man running down here a minute ago?"

"No, sir," one answered.

"Do you see a man anywhere around there now, dressed in a mixed gray suit?"

They looked all around.

"No, sir," the spokesman shouted again.

"Well, it is deuced queer," said Scorcher Sam to himself, running down to the next turn for another look.

The man was not to be seen, however, and so he gave it up. He was out of sight, and would make good his escape with as little loss of time as possible.

The scorcher returned to the bridge.

The policeman had picked up his wheel and was examining it.

It had suffered no damage beyond the fact that the fall had turned the handle-bars slightly.

"I would give a V to have caught that fellow," he said, as he opened his tool-bag to get out his wrench to straighten the handle-bars.

"And I would have caught him the same as I caught you," said the policeman, "if I had been just a little sooner. He was past and you were comin' when I came up on the bridge."

"As it was, you succeeded very well in letting him get away from me."

"Well, don't blame me too hard; I had no way of knowing."

"It can't be helped, anyhow."

"Who was the fellow, anyhow?" asked Dixon.

"I do not know," answered Sam, "but this I do know: That he looked enough like you to have been your twin brother!"

"I thought myself that he looked like somebody I have seen before," admitted Dixon, with a smile. "The first I know, you will be picking me up for him, and running me in."

"You will be lucky if some one else don't pick you off first, making the same mistake," intimated Sam.

"How is that?"

"A fellow is gunning for him, with blood in his eye."

Dixon seemed to be interested, and took the statement in a serious frame of mind, as Sam thought.

"That so?" he queried. "Who is it?"

"A showman up near Fort George, who calls himself Cactus Bill."

Dixon started.

"You mean that?" he demanded.

"Of course I mean it. He would have

shot the fellow, had it not been for me, and he might have done it anyhow, had the chap not stolen my bike and wheeled away."

"And do I really look so much like him?"

"You saw him yourself."

"I know; but we cannot see ourselves as others see us, you know."

"Well, you look enough like him to be his twin brother, as I told you before. You had better steer clear of Cactus Bill."

"What seems to be the trouble between him and the fellow who looks like me?"

"I don't know that myself, as yet."

"Did you learn what the man's name was?"

"The showman called him Louis Murrill, I believe."

To Scorcher Sam's surprise, the man somewhat paled on hearing this, and Sam took renewed interest in him.

"Do you know anything about him?" he demanded.

"Oh, no; I know nothing about him, of course," Dixon assured, hurriedly, as it seemed.

"I thought you acted as if the name was not new to you."

"I will confess I do not want to meet your Cactus Bill."

"Would it not be better to meet him and be introduced, and let me vouch for it that you are not Louis Murrill?"

"No, thank you; I think I will keep clear of him altogether."

"Well, there is wisdom in that, no doubt. However, I have got to go back there with this borrowed wheel, and I will mention the fact that there are two Louis Murrills, and that may be a life preserver for both you and the real Murrill."

"Yes, that is not a bad idea. Do it, by all means."

"And you, officer, just keep your eyes open around here for awhile, and if you see a man who looks like this gentleman, take him in and hold him and let me know."

"I will do it, I promise."

"You won't go with me, eh?" to Dixon.

"No, thank you; I have no desire to pose as Murrill, if that fellow is after his gore."

"Very well. By the way, I suppose you enjoyed your scorch over the bridge, after I got out of sight?"

"Well, since you did not see me at it you must not ask me to testify against myself in the matter," was the laughing reply. "By the way, where is that showman's place?"

Sam named the place.

"Not that I want to see him, you understand; it will save my running into danger. But you have not told me the whole story, evidently. Would you mind telling me all you know about this fellow Murrill and Cactus Bill? But you said you did not know what was the trouble."

CHAPTER V.

CURIOSITY IS AWAKENED.

Scorcher Sam was somewhat puzzled. Something about Phil Dixon he did not understand.

Perhaps he was right, that this man and the other were brothers, and hence Phil's interest.

If so, one or the other of them was going under an assumed name—and perhaps both, since he had not heard the other's name save as declared by the young show-woman.

That would account for the interest manifested by Dixon.

They stood leaning against the parapet

of the bridge, the Scorcher having examined his wheel and found it all right.

"There is not much to tell," he answered Dixon. "A young woman attached to the show first saw and recognized Murrill, and she pointed him out to Cactus Bill."

"And you say he shot at him?"

"No, but would have done so had it not been for me. It was a close call for the fellow, I believe."

"What did the young woman say when she pointed him out?"

"She cried out—'There he is! I would know him among a thousand!' And the showman asked her if she was sure. 'Yes, I would know him anywhere, even in another world!' she answered."

"And she spoke his name?"

"Come to think of it, she did not."

"Then how did you get hold of it?"

"Cactus Bill spoke it, when he ordered the man to stop. 'Stop! or I will drop you in your tracks, Louis Murrill!' he cried."

"He is the girl's champion, then, it would seem, and is taking up some quarrel of hers. From what you have said, I take it that he did not know the man by sight, himself."

"That is the way it looks."

"Do you know what relation he and the young woman bear to each other?"

"No, I do not."

"Is she his wife, do you think?"

"Impossible for me to say; don't know any more about them than you do, Mr. Dixon."

"Of course not; what is the use of my bothering you with questions? Here I am detaining you, and I suppose you want to return that borrowed wheel."

"You are not detaining me, Mr. Dixon. Is that all you want to know about them?"

"I am curious to know all about them, naturally."

"Yes, it seems to have awakened a good deal of curiosity, that is true. I was beginning to think that perhaps you had more than passing interest in them."

"Oh, no," the man hastened to assure.

"Nothing of the kind. I am full of natural curiosity, that is all. And why not? Here is a fellow who looks somewhat like me, who appears to be in danger of his life. Why wouldn't I be interested?"

"There is something in that, I have to admit."

"There is a good deal in it. I would really like to know what more you learn."

"Well, give me your address, and if it is not too far out of the way I will make you a call and let you know how it comes out."

"My address would take you altogether too far out of your way, and I will not trouble you that far. Tell you what I will do, however, that will answer the same purpose."

"What is that?"

"I will come to this part of the city for my bicycle exercise, and will no doubt fall in with you again."

"Yes, we may possibly meet again, that's so. Well, so-long, Mr. Dixon! Steer clear of Fort George until after that affair has been settled, or you may get it in the neck, as the boys say."

"Thank you; I'll take good care not to put myself within shooting distance."

"Oh! by the way—"

"What?"

"Should you run across that fellow—the fellow who looks like you—will you learn something about him if you can?"

"Sure; with pleasure."

"And then if we chance to meet again we'll exchange confidences."

"Nothing would please me better. I feel quite honored at thus having the confidence of a real police detective; am glad that I have made your acquaintance."

The Scorcher mounted his wheel and started back toward the avenue—Amsterdam—with the other wheel in tow, so to say. He guided it along by one of the handle-bars, steadying his own machine with one hand—not an easy trick, but one that any accomplished rider can do, taking due care to avoid a contact of pedals.

Dixon accompanied him as far as the avenue, where he turned in the direction of High Bridge Park, Buckley going north in the direction of the place from which he had started.

The detective was turning the matter over in mind as he rode along.

Not that there was a "case" in it; he did not think that; but when anything piqued his curiosity he generally liked to learn all there was to be learned about it before he let go.

He decided to know more about this.

Approaching the tent of the Western sport-showman, he found that the crowd had dispersed, and that only the ordinary concourse was present.

A little knot near the bicycle stand, however, remained, in the center of which was a man who seemed to be laboring under some great excitement, and Scorcher Sam rightly guessed who he was.

It was the owner of the wheel Sam had borrowed.

A woman near the curb, leaning on a wheel, called to him and pointed as Sam was drawing near.

The man stepped out of the group with whom he had been standing and looked down the avenue, and as Sam drew up and stopped he shook his fist and called out:

"What right had you to go off with a wheel that didn't belong to you, I want to know?"

"Keep cool, sir!" said the detective. "Here is your wheel, all in good condition, and much obliged to you for it. It was a case of necessity, and I borrowed it."

"You had no right to do it, though, and I've a notion to make you pay dearly for it."

"One wheelman ought to be glad to aid another, under such circumstances. By taking your wheel I was enabled to rescue my own, you see, and the only damage done was the inconvenience of a little delay."

"A little delay. You have kept me here almost half an hour—"

"Well, you have got your wheel now; go off and say no more about it. You make me tired."

"Make you tired, do I?" loudly. "I'll make you tireder, if you ever take my wheel again, or any other man that does it! For one cent I would—"

"I would take your wheel again, under the circumstances, or any other man's," returned Sam, sternly. "I would take your horse and carriage, if necessity demanded it, if you had such."

"Do you mean to tell me—"

"Yes, and I will take you in, if you don't shut right up and get out of here," cried Sam, showing his badge.

The man's unreasonableness had tried his patience too far, when he would gladly have done the same in his behalf, had the circumstances of the case been reversed.

"What is your number?" the irate man blustered. "I will see about your case, my bantam! I'll see whether we pay our police to talk back to us in this

fashion or not, and I'll see how far your rights to take another man's property extend. I'll see—"

"Don't tell me anything more about it," warned Sam. "I'll give you my name as well as my number, if you want it, and you are welcome to go straight to headquarters with any complaint you have to make against me in this matter. Move on now, for you are drawing a crowd. If you don't go at once, I'll do myself the honor to put you under arrest and escort you."

CHAPTER VI.

TAMING JOHN HENRY.

The Scorcher meant business, for he advanced upon the irate gentleman as he spoke the words of fair warning.

The other man was bigger than he, and somewhat older, with red hair and a fiery red mustache—and evidently a temper to match, but that made no difference.

The woman in the case was for peace, and was tugging at the man's sleeve, trying to induce him to come away. She was evidently his wife, for no one else in the world would have ventured such familiarity with a man of such fierce and fiery mein.

"Come away, John Henry, come away!" she urged. "You will only get into trouble if you don't. Don't you see he is a policeman?"

"I want his name and number, that is all I want," cried the angry John Henry. "I'm going to see what we pay our police for, whether it is to protect our property or appropriate and make off with it at pleasure. I'm going to see what rights a law-abiding—"

"Come away, John Henry—"

"Yes, come away with me!" supplemented the Scorcher, laying a hand on his shoulder. "You would not take my warning, so I must keep my word with you. I hate to disappoint a gentleman of your stripe. We'll go to the nearest station together, where you will be given time to reflect upon the rights of citizens, and so forth. Will you walk or ride?"

"Release me, sirrah!" the individual shouted, striving to get away, but Sam seemed like a mountain to move.

"You are my prisoner."

"Remove your hand, sirrah!"

"Do you prefer to walk or ride?"

"Let him go, please!" pleaded the woman. "I will take him away; I promise you I will."

"You will take me away, Marthy Jane Doolittle?" cried the irate, as he turned upon her fiercely. "You will take me away? I would like to see the woman that could take me where I didn't want to go—"

A crowd was around them by this time, and it was fast being augmented.

They all laughed heartily at that, but this laughter only served to increase red-head's choler, and he fretted like the fabled porcupine.

"Yes, I'll take you," iterated the woman, with grim determination in her tone, and her mouth formed itself into a straight line that was not to be mistaken.

"Did I ever!" cried the man, looking at her disdainfully.

"If you never did you will now," was the response. "You are making a fool of yourself, John Henry Doolittle!"

"We can't allow discussion of the matter here, madam," interrupted Scorcher Sam. "The domestic arena is the place to settle such points. I will let you take him from the police court—"

"All I want is your name, sir, your name and number!"

"You'll get those at the station," as-

sured Sam, giving him a pull and taking him right along.

Cactus Bill was an interested auditor. He had taken hold of Sam's wheel, at a signal from him, so Sam had both hands free to manage his man.

Mr. Doolittle struggled, but found that he was no match for Sam, and, seeing that the detective really meant to carry out his threat, he began to "take water," as the saying is.

"But my wheel!" he exclaimed. "You will damage my wheel! You have got me at a disadvantage! And my wife—she will be without a protector if I am obliged to go to the station with you. Your name and number, that's all I want of you; I will do the rest."

"You are a fool, John Henry Doolittle!" cried the woman. "Let him go, please, Mr. Officer, and he will go with me fast enough. You know right well you will, John Henry. If you don't, I will create one of the worst scenes here you ever dreamed of in your life. You hear me?"

"But, Marthy Jane, think—"

"Think of nothing. Will you come with me or won't you? I am not arrested, and I'm going away from here this minute."

"Hold on! hold on!" cried the irate John Henry. "I'll go with you; all I want is this fellow's name and number, and if I don't put him in a sweater for the indignity heaped upon me—"

"Will you go to the station, or will you go peaceably with your wife? Take your choice!"

"I'll go! I'll go!" averred the man. "I'll go with her now, for I have no time to fool away with you; but you will hear from me again, I promise—"

"John Henry!"

The woman now took hold of him and gave him a shaking.

"Get on your wheel, this minnit, or you will see one of the very worst scenes right here that you ever dreamed of! What are you thinkin' about, anyhow?"

The Scorcher let go his hold and gave the woman a signal to take charge, stepping back out of the way. By that time a couple of regular policemen had appeared, and one of them Sam knew.

"Move this crowd on, Jerry," he called out to him. "The excitement is all over and nothing more to be seen."

This the two policemen proceeded to do, while the irate Doolittle, under the guidance of his better half, was moving in the opposite direction.

"I'll see about your case, young man," he called back as he rode away. "I'll see what we pay our police for—" but he ceased suddenly, and nothing further was heard from him.

The crowd dispersed, Scorcher Sam could give his attention to the showman.

The young woman in the fancy attire was near him, and two or three other performers were standing around.

"Well, you got the wheel back, I see," observed Cactus Bill.

"Yes, but I didn't get the man; he managed to get away from me."

"Too bad, after we have waited and watched so long to get a sight of him," the girl spoke.

She knew the language well enough, but, as said, she spoke with a pronounced foreign accent, that lent a charm to what she said.

"Are you sure it was the man you want?" asked Sam.

"Oh! do you think I could be mistaken, after all he has made me suffer?" she asked, and her wide eyes looked up into his appealingly. "No, no; I am sure it was Louis Murrill."

"Then there must be two Louis Murrills," said the detective.

"Two Louis Murrills. What mean you?" And the young woman looked from Sam to Cactus Bill, wondering.

"I mean that if the man who took my wheel from here has not a twin brother, then he has a double, for I have seen two of him, if I may use such an expression."

"Impossible!" cried the young woman. "There is only one Louis Murrill, and he was the man you saw here. You have been fooled; you have seen the same person twice and have been imposed upon. Oh! why did you interfere with my brother in his just vengeance?"

CHAPTER VII.

CACTUS BILL'S PLEDGE.

Scorcher Sam was one point ahead.

He now knew the relationship that existed between Cactus Bill and the young woman.

But that only served to whet his appetite for more knowledge concerning them and their grievance against the man, Louis Murrill. That it was no trifling matter their hatred attested.

"That view of it might be acceptable, madam, were it not for the fact that I saw them both together, at one and the same time," the detective rejoined; "as well as for the fact that they were differently attired, and that one made his escape while the other remained."

"It is wonderful; I do not comprehend."

"You are sure the one we saw here was Murrill?"

"Yes, yes; I could not be mistaken in that face, sir."

"You do not know him yourself, sir, it appears," turning to Cactus Bill.

"No, I have relied entirely on my sister's recognition of him," was the answer. "I do not believe she was mistaken."

"Then I wish it were possible for me to bring both of these men face to face with each other here before you. I think you might find it difficult to tell one from the other."

"Did Louis have a brother?" asked the showman.

"Not that I ever knew of," answered his sister.

"And yet you are positive in what you state?" turning to the detective again.

"It is just as I have stated it to you," assured Sam. "There are two of the men, and they look very much alike. There is a question I would like to ask, madam—"

"No, no! I cannot tell you, I cannot tell you," cried the young woman, motioning him off with her hands. "It is something that I will not repeat, but that I would willingly forget if I could—no no; not forget; heaven forbid it!"

The Scorcher was nonplussed, but his curiosity was greater than ever; he believed that an interesting story lay behind it all.

It had not been his intention to ask for that, however, and he hastened to set himself right in that respect. By winning the regard of these strange persons he would get the story all in good time.

"You do not understand me," he said quickly. "It is nothing of your secret that I would ask; I was on the point of inquiring if there is any mark of any kind upon the real Louis Murrill by which you could unmistakably identify him?"

"A mark? Yes, yes! There is a mark on his throat, just beneath his collar, a white seam that looks as if his throat had been cut and had healed up again. It is two inches long, in a straight line

across. If there is any doubt, that will settle it; but, how can there be any doubt? The man I saw was surely Louis Murrill."

"You did not see the mark on his throat?"

"No, but I saw his face."

"That is not enough, in view of what I have just told you. It is more than lucky that I prevented your killing him, Cactus Bill."

"I had no intention of killing him, as I said," was the response. "You know what kind of a marksman I am; I would have put a bullet where it would have stopped him merely."

"And perhaps wounded an innocent man. I could not allow that, even did I know your intention and the chance were to happen again. But, go slow! Next time you may get the other fellow, and it is certain that both cannot be Murrill."

"Can you tell them apart, if you see them again?" asked the showman.

"Yes, I can tell the one I am most familiar with, or the other if he is in the same attire."

"Do they look so very much alike?" asked the young woman.

"Strikingly so; and yet were we to see their faces side by side we could no doubt find great differences."

"Then we shall be uncertain, next time, if we fall in with him again, whether it is Murrill or not, brother. Oh! that you had not interfered, sir! You do not know—"

"Is the man guilty of a crime?" Scorcher Sam inquired.

"Yes, yes! a monstrous crime."

"And you have not reported it to the police? I will make it my business to take him if I can run across him again."

"No, we have not told the police, sir; in fact, it is not a recent crime, and it is our own private affair, anyhow. Oh! that you had not interfered. I have waited so long, so long!"

While this was being said, others were shouting out the merits of the show, and some people were entering the tent. There would soon be enough to pay for another performance, and the young woman left her brother and disappeared around the tent.

Scorcher Sam gazed after her with something of admiration, perhaps, for she was petite and graceful.

Cactus Bill saw the look.

As Sam looked again at him, there was a dark expression on the Western sport's face.

"It was honest admiration," observed Sam, in his frank manner. "A man has a right to admire what he sees, if it awakens admiration. You can take no offense."

"No, no offense," returned the sport. "Her young heart has been seared, and there remains nothing for her but death, I fear."

"Death? And so young."

"The young die as well as the old. You do not see my sister as she was. Had you known her before—before her sorrow came upon her, you would hardly recognize her now. You would see, as I see, that the seal is upon her."

"I am not willing to believe that, Cactus Bill. The wrong may yet be righted; when she will regain her spirits and be as she was."

"Impossible! You do not understand."

"No, I do not understand, nor do I ask your confidence. At the same time I have a detective's curiosity."

"And you mean to gratify it if you can?"

"Certainly."

"Well, to do that you must find Murrill."

"Of course; that is something I hope to accomplish."

"Then there is a favor I would ask. If you do find him, put me on his track. Come, is it a bargain?"

"On condition that you pledge me your word that you will not kill him."

"Very well; I give my word that I will not kill him."

"Then it is a bargain. I will try to bring you and him together, if I can get sight of him. Can you give me any clew toward finding him?"

"Not the slightest."

"Yet you hoped to find him here in New York?"

"Yes; my sister has looked diligently, and almost despairingly. It is hard for her to bear, to have seen the man and know that he has escaped her."

"And on your part, you promise to go slow if you fall in with him first, lest you get hold of the wrong man? This is evidently a case that will be difficult to settle."

"The settling will be easy enough, once we get the right party. But I promise all that you ask. You are a detective, and if your skill is anything like your grip, you are a good one. You held me as if I had been a mere boy—"

"Pshaw! I had the advantage of you, that was all," Sam passed it off, though he knew well enough what his strength was. "Well, I must be going, for I have an appointment to keep. I'll run up and see you again before long, for you may be of some use to me, now that we are acquainted."

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISMAL DUNCE DUPED.

Scorcher Sam went away in a strange frame of mind.

Here was one of the most peculiar bits of mystery that had ever come his way.

Whether there was even a case in it was yet in doubt, though he fully believed there was, and one of no ordinary caliber, at that.

Leading his wheel out into the street, he looked up and down the thoroughfare as if for some person whom he expected about that hour, but whom he failed as yet to discover.

Mounting, he pedaled slowly down in the direction of the tower.

The recognition of Dona Teresa (such was the young woman's name on the show posters) of the man Louis Murrill had been so positive as hardly to admit of a doubt; but there was the peculiar resemblance Phil Dixon held to that man; and more, the impression the mention of the matter had seemed to have upon him. It appeared almost positive that he and Murrill must be related closely, and Sam believed they were brothers.

That was one point to be settled, if he had the good fortune to fall in with either of them again.

He went along at low speed.

Presently his face lighted; he evidently saw the person whose appearance he had been expecting.

It was a young woman, jauntily attired and mounted on a fine wheel, coming toward him. He was on the point of turning to join her, when she gave him a sign.

"Not wanted, eh?" said Sam to himself. "What's in the wind, my Bonny Bessie Blake?"

She it was, the dauntless little boulevard detective, Scorcher Sam's ally.

As she came nearer, she looked irresistibly bewitching.

An excellent rider, her costume set her

off to perfection, being at once modest but chic.

Heeding her signal, Sam passed her without appearing to recognize her, though their eyes met and he gave her a wink.

"No flirting," she said, just loudly enough for him to hear. "See what is coming after me; I have got one of the roughest on my string, I guess; you do the rest."

There was no time for Sam to respond in words, without speaking louder than would have been desirable.

So he passed on and looked to see what was following.

And he saw.

Right here a few words of explanation will not be out of place, in order to a clear understanding.

Complaints had been received from that neighborhood concerning a gang of roughs, who, if they did not belong there, had been infesting that neighborhood with their presence.

Their offenses need not all be particularized, but they were of such a nature that the attention of the police commissioners had been called to them more than once, and they had instructed the police captain of the precinct in regard to the matter.

Not only that, but they had sent Scorcher Sam there to look into affairs a little on the quiet.

One of the offenders was called Don Quixote.

He was so called because it seemed apparent that he had entered upon a conquest, though in his case it was a conquest of hearts.

"Don Quixote on Wheels" he was more fully termed, while, the name having been given the Spanish pronunciation in the first instance, he was now known to the police as "Donkey Hota."

And the Scorcher believed that this was the chap.

He had never seen him before, but the description seemed to fit closely.

He was togged out fetchingly—if a little polite slang be admissible—in bright tan slippers, red-checked hose, light suit of diagonal plaid of very pronounced pattern, and cap to match.

Not only so, but his left lapel supported a gorgeous flower, and an eyeglass was screwed into one eye. He was a stunner, looked at from his own point of view, and Scorcher Sam felt certain that he was the "Donkey Hota" he had heard about.

There were other wheelmen in sight, but he singled this one out at once as the fellow Bessie Blake had referred to.

He allowed him to come on and pass.

"That is the chap, ten to one on it," Sam said to himself. "And I am after him, too. We'll see how he will make it with Bonny Bess."

The detective laughed to himself as he turned his wheel and fell in behind the masher, for he knew there was a surprise in store for the chappie when he attempted to pick up the acquaintance with Bessie Blake.

Needless to say, she had come out purposely to lure the conceited idiot into Sam's net.

Bessie rode straight on, paying no heed whatever to the fellow, who was slowly gaining upon her, and after him rode Scorcher Sam on his special mount, the swiftest wheel in New York.

Finally, in front of the Isabella Heimath, at the top of the hill, Bessie Blake drew in to the sidewalk and stopped by the wall that incloses the grounds of that institution, stepping from her wheel to the curbstone with much grace.

Don Quixote was there in a moment. It was his old trick, and Scorcher Sam was sure of his man the moment he saw it.

"Donkey" ran up close to the curb, as if he had not looked for the lady to turn in there, and as if unable to guide his wheel away from the curb or stop, ran into Bessie's wheel.

The collision, or run-in, was the lightest and slightest imaginable, done on purpose, of course, and chappie was off in an instant, cap in hand, bowing and scraping and offering apology by the yard. Sam was not near enough to hear what he said, but the sight was enough.

Bessie looked at him coldly and accepted his apology, and acted as if she expected him to go on about his business.

Sam now rode slowly by.

"But your wheel—I hope I have done it no damage," the fellow was saying. "Could nevvah forgive myself if I have, you know. I must look and see. It was deuced awkward of me, deuced awkward, and all that; don't see what got the mat-tah with my wheel."

Bessie gave Sam a wink as he passed, and Sam smiled. The dismal dunce was on his knees examining the wheel, feeling it here and there and testing it in various ways, or pretending to do so. Sam rode to the opposite side of the street and stopped, and enjoyed the situation immensely while he waited for the climax.

It was the "Donkey," no mistaking him now, and he was up to one of his favorite tricks. Selecting good-looking ladies for his victims, he usually made their acquaintance by pretending to find something the matter with their bicycles, which he offered to remedy. And then, the work done, it was his game to take a sudden kiss from the lady's lips and mount his wheel and spin away to repeat the trick on some one else.

So, Sam knew what was coming, and hence the situation had a double zest for him.

Sure enough, chappie found something wrong about the wheel, and opened the tool-bag and took out the wrench to make it right, all the while making a show of the most deferential politeness.

He tinkered and fussed around for a few moments, pretended to try the improvement he had made, and finding it satisfactory, put the wrench back into the bag and closed it up. He then lifted his cap, and Bessie was seen to thank him, as she stood holding her wheel.

But she was only pretending to hold it, for she knew what was coming. She was allowing it to lean against her, so that she could let go with her hands without danger of its falling, and the moment chappie sprang forward to take the accustomed kiss she brought him a couple of stinging slaps with her gauntleted hands, first on one side of his face and then on the other.

At the same time she uttered a scream, as agreed upon with Scorcher Sam, and the fellow took the alarm and left her instantly, mounting his wheel and spinning away down the avenue, very red in the face and very much in a hurry. After him went the Scorcher, calling to laughing Bessie to follow, and the idiot, glancing back and finding that he was being pursued, bent himself to the task of scorching away.

CHAPTER IX.

BESSIE BLAKE ASSISTS.

The Scorcher, also, was laughing.

This was only play for him, for he knew by chappie's slender legs that he

had no great speed at his command, and probably less staying power.

Sam would have been willing to bet that Bessie herself could overtake and arrest him single-handed, had the occasion required. He could have overhauled him within two blocks, had he so desired.

The detective worked along easily, keeping just about so close, and Bessie was now coming on after him, and gaining.

"Donkey" looked back again, presently, and put on more steam.

Away they went, three in a row, about half a block apart, the man in the lead doing good execution with his slender legs.

Sam looked back to see where Bessie was, and she waved him a laughing signal for his encouragement, if he needed it, which she well knew he did not, so far as the race was concerned.

No one interfered with them, and several blocks were wheeled off, the gay masher finding his pursuer just so near every time he looked, and every time making an effort to increase the distance between them, until he was perspiring freely and panting.

Presently the fellow turned to the right into a street that presented fair wheeling, and Sam knew that he was making for Kingsbridge Road. Having no desire to go in that direction himself, and not wanting to overtax Bessie, Sam called upon the fellow to stop, but that had only the effect to make him work the harder to get away.

With a little imprecation, the Scorcher let out his speed.

Before another block had been covered he was up with his man, and had seized him by the shoulder.

Chappie wobbled and would have taken a header if Sam's strong arm had not controlled both wheels while they came to a stop, and the moment they did stop Sam lifted his prisoner bodily off his seat.

"Why didn't you stop when I told you to?" he demanded.

"Wh—wh—what do you mean, fellah?" the chappie gasped and panted, his hand fluttering for his eyegless, with which to transfix his foe with a single icy stare. "H—h—how dare you?"

"Come off," said Sam, with disgust. "You are the chap I want, and you know what I want you for. Here comes the young lady whose wheel you so gallantly attended to just now, and she will make the charge that will insure you a berth in the cooler."

"But, I—er—a—I have done nothing; on my word I have done nothing."

"No: she did it all," assured Sam, smiling.

Just then Bessie rode up.

"So you caught him?" she cried. "Oh, you naughty wretch, you!"

She shook one of her dainty fists at the masher, who, very much overheated, looked anything but a masher just then.

"What do you want done with him?" asked Sam.

"I want him locked up; that is what I want done with him, sir; and I will appear against him, too."

"Do you hear, chappie?"

"No, no, lady; do not go to that extreme. I am sorry, deuced sorry, don't you know," pleaded the kisser. "I will never so much as look at you again, if you will let me off this time."

"Then you acknowledge the corn, do you?" demanded Sam.

"Think of the temptation," pleaded the fellow, some of his assurance returning.

"How is that for a compliment, Bess?"

cried Sam. "Have you got it in your heart to press the case after that? Ha! ha! ha!"

"He is a ninny!" cried the young woman angrily. "Of course, I'll press the case—not on my own account, for I think I rather got the best of him, but on account of the many others he has insulted."

"But I nevvah—"

"There, now, don't add any lies," said Bessie. "It happened that you picked up the wrong girl this time, that is all."

"Yes, that is all," said Sam. "The fact of the matter is, my fine young gentleman, you fell into a trap that was set for you, and hanged yourself with your own rope."

"Who—who are you?"

"My name is Buckley; called Scorcher Sam, for short."

On hearing that, the man wilted completely, for he knew into whose hands he had fallen.

He begged like a good fellow, as the saying goes, but it was of no use; his captors had come out hunting, and it was not likely they would let their game go after bagging it.

He was allowed to mount his wheel, and the trio rode to the nearest station, where chappie was duly docketed and sent down below, with the prospect of a neat fine to pay on the morrow. He bitterly protested, and the last they heard of him he was vowing vengeance.

"Well, there is one less, anyhow," said Sam, as he and Bessie rode away.

"Yes; it is not likely that he will bother any more ladies for a time," Bessie responded. "I felt half sorry for the poor fool, though."

"There, now, soft heart, turn to pitying him after you have juggled him. It is the best thing that could have happened to him—my opinion; it will take some of the conceit out of him."

"And perhaps give him a little sense, eh?"

"I don't know whether it will be possible for so simple a remedy to work so great a change or not," rejoined Sam, laughing.

"Well, what more do you want of me this morning?"

"I have run up against a case."

"You are always doing that. What is it this time?"

"Right there is the mystery of it, Bess; I'll be hanged if I know what it is."

"That is a likely story."

"It is the fact."

"What is it like?"

"I'll tell you, my little lieutenant; and I wish I were an artist, so that I could draw a face for you."

"A face?"

"Yes; the face of a man—rather two men—I would like you to have your eyes open for. But that is out of the question, as I am not an artist."

"That is where a Tom Thumb camera would come into play."

"The same as you use, eh?"

"You bet. When I see a face I want to remember, click!—and there I have it."

As she spoke she took from the pocket of her dress a tiny camera not more than an inch and a half square, and had Scorcher Sam's picture in a second.

"I must have one of those, sure enough," said Sam. "But the story I have to tell you—that can be done without the aid of photography. I want you to drop in at a show up here on the hill. 'Cactus Bill's Circus' you will find it billed, and—"

"I see; you want to get me scalped."

"No, no, nothing dangerous in it, Bess. I want you to make the acquaintance of one of the performers."

"And have him lasso me and carry me off into the Wild West to become his bride? Oh, no, thank you; I had rather cling to the evils I know all about than be hustled off into others that—"

"Suppose you try to be serious for a minute or two—"

"Was never more serious in all my life," declared the young lady, with a smile in her eyes.

"The trouble is, you are like all the rest of your sex, always supposing a man in the case," said Sam. "I did not say anything about a man, did I? The person I want you to pipe is a young woman."

"Oh!"

"So you see you were off on the wrong tack entirely. There is a young woman there called Dona Teresa, sister to Cactus Bill. I would like you to work yourself into her good graces, and perhaps she will make a confidante of you and tell you something of her history."

"Oh! I begin to see. You have lost your heart to a Spanish beauty of midnight eyes, and you want me to help along your suit. All right, give me my cue, and I'll do all I can for you, Sam."

"First of all, hold that nimble tongue of yours while I tell the story," said Sam; and forthwith he gave her the incidents of the morning.

CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHTINGALE ASSISTS.

Bessie Blake was an aide to be depended on in any emergency.

The Scorcher and she had worked together for nearly a year at the time of our story, and there was a perfect understanding between them.

The girl was something of a tease, or would have been if Sam had been teasing, which he was not. It was about an even thing between them, and one could seldom claim any advantage over the other.

She listened attentively to the particulars of the matter Sam was interested in, as they rode slowly along, and when he concluded Sam asked her opinion respecting the puzzle. It was, he said, really none of his business, but it had taken a hold upon him that he could not shake off.

"I suppose it is the old, old story," she said simply.

"You mean regarding Dona Teresa."

"Yes."

"You may be right, but I think you are wrong. You have come to that conclusion before you have seen her."

"Then there is more to it than you have told me, evidently. If you consider my opinion worth anything, Sam, you must give me all the points so that I may give it intelligently."

"You have got all the points; your conclusion is a natural one, and yet I cannot quite agree with you. But, your opinion respecting the two men was what I more particularly meant. Do you think they have something in common, or was it mere coincidence?"

"I don't believe they ever saw or heard of each other before, Sam."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Then you are one point ahead of me. Just explain. I have come to have the highest respect for your opinion."

"My opinion is, then, that Dona Teresa made a mistake in her recognition, and that Cactus Bill frightened the life out of an innocent man, who, to get away, borrowed a wheel and—"

"That one fact tells against him."

"A pistol in the hands of such a

marksman was a strong incentive to acceleration."

"And a wheel was the quickest means at hand, eh? Well, giving him the benefit of the doubt, what about the other fellow?"

"I believe that he is the real Louis Murrill."

"By Jupiter!"

"Then you had not thought of that?"

"My wits must have been wool-gathering, sure enough. Score a big one for yourself, Bess!"

"Then you agree with me?"

"Well, you are as likely to be right in your theory as I in mine, if not a little more so."

"Thank you. And if I am right, that he is the man, you know where you are likely to run across him again, of course. You don't need spectacles to see that."

"Not at Cactus Bill's, surely."

"Possibly, in a disguise, but that is not where I mean."

"Oh! I see—"

"Of course you see; a blind man could see. He will go fooling around the St. Nicholas avenue nightingale again, the way you say he seemed to be stuck on her, and there will be your place to get on his shadow."

"That is a happy thought, Bess. I will profit by it. I tell you I would not be half a detective, were it not for you as my aide."

"Pshaw! you made your reputation before you ever saw me."

"That don't matter; I have come to lean a good deal upon your help, whenever we have a case together, my girl."

"Don't get familiar, now," said the girl, putting up her hand. "You don't know whether you have got a case or not, yet, and in those we have had I don't claim any credit."

"You have had your share of it, all the same," said Sam.

"Well, no matter. Do you want me to rope in any more kissing dudes for you to-day?"

"No, that will be all for this time, I guess. Give your attention to Cactus Bill's show, and get into the good graces of Dona Teresa, if you can. We will have to look to her for the solution."

"Which you will not get."

"You think not?"

"That is the way it looks to me, after what you have said of her manner when speaking about it."

"That is all right, Bess; I know that I could not succeed, but if you take hold of it you will be able to get at the secret, and then we'll know where we are at."

"Why will you persist in using slang?"

"Slang? Bless your innocent heart, Bess, that is a classic!"

"Well, where are you going?"

"I am going to drop around and see Molly McGee, the jolly Irish lass, again. She may be able to help me a good deal."

"More than I, perhaps."

"Only in learning what she can about our man, if he comes there."

"Well, ta-ta, Sammy. Will see you later. I'll go up and scrape acquaintance with Cactus Bill."

With a smile and a nod, Bessie Blake turned her wheel, and the Scorcher lifted his hat to her politely as she pedaled away.

"There is a girl in a thousand," he said to himself. "Sam, my boy, you are in luck to stand so well in her good opinion, I tell you. She is as good a detective as you are yourself, or a better."

Watching her until she turned a corner, and lifting his hat to her again as

she glanced back in his direction, he then turned and set off to see Molly McGee.

When he came in sight of the corner where the McGee shanty stood, he noticed a number of loiterers along the curb outside the high fence that concealed the shanty from view, and he rightly guessed that Molly was singing again.

He was not mistaken.

Coming a little nearer, he heard her clear, strong voice rendering a popular song.

Scorcher Sam went past the corner, then dismounted and entered with his wheel at the open space where a panel of the fence had been set back a little.

Molly was there, and looked up as he entered.

The washing was all done and the snowy clothes were on the line, and the empty tubs were standing bottom-up in the shade, while she was adding the finishing touches to the cleaning up.

"Ho! and is it you?" she cried.

"It is nobody else, my girl," said the intruder.

"Sure, it is not yure gurrel Oi am, at all at all," she gave him to understand. "Oi am Mike Murtha's own, and no wan's else, so there!"

"I wouldn't think of trying to cut Mike out, Molly, for he is a good friend of mine. I meant it just the same as I mean when I say 'my boy' to Mike. See?"

"Sure, it is all right, sor; Oi was only funnin' wid ye."

"Well, I didn't want to be misunderstood, that was all. Wouldn't want to have Mike jealous of me, you know."

"And naythur would Oi, sor. Sure, he has bad blood, whin it is up, so he has. Phwat did ye do wid thot other chap that was here wid ye whin ye was here before?"

"He is the fellow I have come to see you about, Molly."

"About him?"

"Yes."

"Phwat do Oi know about him?"

"I want you to learn something about him, if he comes here again."

"Oh-ho! Then me own impression av him was not fur wrong, maybe. Oi took him fur a blackleg, sor, on me wurred."

"You did?"

"Thot same Oi did, sor."

"Well, you may be right, for all I know to the contrary. That is what I want to find out."

"Very well, sor, though, on me wur-rud Oi don't loike to have him hangin' around. And if Mike should come in and foind him here, goodness only knows what would happen!"

CHAPTER XI.

SAM ASSIGNED TO SERVICE.

Molly McGee was as good as gold.

She was betrothed to a sturdy young bricklayer whose name has been mentioned, and, not looking above her station, but making herself content and happy therein, she was likely to make a good wife to the man of her choice.

The Scorcher had made her acquaintance through a service rendered to her lover, and enjoyed the friendship of both alike. Mike had been accused of a crime of which he was innocent, and Sam proved his innocence.

Sam appreciated the point raised, and thought for a moment.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Molly," he said. "I will go and find Mike and tell him about it, so he will understand."

"Thot is just the thing," cried the girl. "You do thot, and Oi will do phwat ever ye say. But, do ye know he is comin'?"

here again? Phwat business is it brings him here?"

"No, I don't know that he is coming here, Molly, but he may. As to what will bring him, what but a nightingale voice and a pretty face?"

"Bah! go 'long wid yer blarney, now."

"I mean it."

"Sure, it is not singin' another wurrud Oi'll be, so dhere."

"Don't give up your singing, Molly; too bad your voice has never been cultivated—"

"Phwat's thot?"

"Oh, made perfect by care and study, under some great musician, so you could sing opera, and all that sort of thing, you know. You wouldn't have to do washing, then."

"Oi guess me voice is good enough as it is, sor," was the rejoinder to that. "Sure and Oi was an opera singer Oi couldn't marry Mike, and phwat would loife be worth widout Mike? Oh, no, Oi guess me voice is good enough as it is, and Oi'm not cryin'."

"Well, I guess you are right, after all," said Sam.

"And as fur dhe washin', Oi loike it."

"Mike will have a jewel when he gets you, sure enough, and if he doesn't appreciate the fact and use you well he had ought to be horsewhipped, that is all."

"Never you fear fur Mike, sor."

"Well, to business: If that fellow comes again, talk with him and find out all you can about him. Get his name and where he lives, if possible, though not at all likely you can do that. Anyhow, I want you to pay particular attention to his throat."

"And phwat's the matter wid his t'roat?"

"I want you to see if there is a scar on it."

"On his neck, ye do be meanin', don't ye?"

"Neck, if you please; the front part, down where his collar should be."

"And suppose he has a collar on?"

"Then you will not be likely to see it, of course, but he may have on the same outing shirt he had on this morning, and that was rather low, if you noticed."

"Well, all roight; but don't you furget to tell Mike."

"Where is he at work?"

The girl mentioned the place.

"All right, I will go there and ask for him and make it right with him. He might toss a brick at my man, if he came here and found him talking with you."

"Oi wouldn't have it happen fur dhe wurreld, sor."

"Well, I'll go and see him right away and fix that matter. Pardon me for taking up your time, Molly."

"Och! that is all roight, sor, afther dhe good turn ye done fur Mike thot toime. Only fur you, sor, he moight now be in prison, and him as innocent as Oi was mesel'."

"Don't mention it again, my girl—Your pardon; I mean Miss McGee."

The nightingale laughed, as Sam doffed his hat and made her a bow, and after a few more remarks the Scorcher took leave.

True to his word, he set out to find Mike Murtha, but on asking for him at the building where he was employed, found that he had not been at work that day.

Not knowing where he lived, and not thinking it of great importance, anyhow, Sam did not look further.

He went home.

There he found a note from headquarters.

It was a brief message from his superior, asking him to come in for an interview as soon as possible.

Sam ate his lunch and took a little rest, then set out.

"You got my note?" asked the chief, when Sam entered the private office at headquarters.

"Yes, sir," the Scorcher Detective answered.

"I have a piece of business for you to look into, Sam."

"So I supposed. What is it?"

"You have been up around Fort George?"

"Just came from there, sir."

"Well, this matter will take you back to the same neighborhood."

"All right, I am agreeable to that, as I have already got a mystery on my hands up there."

"So much the better, if this will not interfere with that. If it does, I will put some one else on this so as not to interfere with any other plans you may have."

"Let me have the particulars, then I can decide."

"All right, give me your attention. I will be brief and right to the point. I think we are on the track at last of those mysterious robbers who have been playing such havoc with the big silk and jewelry stores of late—in fact, I am sure we are, if you can only follow up the clew."

"Why have you called me for the service? I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought, Sam. The others are stumped, and say there is no clew to follow."

"Then you may as well save your breath, chief, as tell me the story, if that is the way the others look at it. What can I hope to do where such men as—"

"You will take hold of this case, Sam Buckley, and I expect you to solve the mystery. Now, not another word out of you, sir, till you hear what the case is, and then I want to be assured that my confidence in you has not been misplaced."

Sam was silent—he had been ordered to silence.

"At an early hour this morning," the chief went on, "an undertaker's wagon broke down under the bridge that unites the two parts of Trinity Cemetery, on Eleventh Avenue, and there, strange to say, it was deserted."

Still Sam was silent.

"There it was deserted, I say," the chief went on, "and there a patrolman found it; and not only so, but he found that it was loaded with silk and laces, evidently stolen, spilled along the curb from the bursted body of the wagon, and he took charge of it, of course."

Sam said not a word.

"The patrolman took the rig to the station and reported the matter, and a report of it was sent to me. About the same time that I received that, I got a complaint from Baltman & Co., stating that their store had been robbed during the night to the extent of several thousand dollars' worth of goods. One of their men went up and examined these things, and identified the lot as the stolen goods. There you have it."

"You want me to speak now?" asked Sam.

"Of course I want you to speak now. What is your opinion of the matter?"

"You say there is no clew, so I suppose it is useless for me to ask questions concerning the horse, wagon, and so forth."

"They say there is no clew, but that does not prove that you will not find one. Go ahead and ask all the questions you want to, and see what you can make of it."

Thereupon Sam put a number of questions to his chief, with which we will not weary the reader, as to the identity of the wagon, how marked, the horse, what kind, and so on; but when he had done he found that he had learned nothing that was likely to give him any light.

His chief looked at him, as if fearful that he would give it up, as the others had done. Of course, not every man on the force had been called, but several of them had, with that result. They could see no way of proving where the rig was bound for at the time of the accident; would it be the same with Scorcher Sam?

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCORCHER'S EXPERIMENT.

It was a case calculated to baffle anybody.

The wagon bore the name and address of its presumed owner; but there was no undertaking establishment at the number given.

In fact, there was none anywhere near that place, nor had such a name ever been heard of there. Hence, it had to be concluded that the wagon was a clever blind for a different business.

Sam remained in thought for several minutes.

The chief began to get anxious, and finally he broke out:

"Now, don't say that you give it up; I won't hear to it. I want you to trace that wagon to its destination."

"Well, you give me a pretty stubborn task, chief; but I will undertake it, nevertheless. I suppose the others have taken every mark on the wagon and harness—"

"Yes, yes; everything that promised a clue even in the remotest manner."

"But they have left the horse?"

"Yes, the horse is in charge of that precinct."

"Then I will take the horse, sir. I see no other way, and even that is not very promising."

"But a horse can't talk, Sam."

"No; but a horse has got horse sense, and I will rely on that."

"What do you mean to do?"

"Why, simple enough, chief. I will have the horse hitched to some sort of wagon and drive up under the arch where the accident occurred, and let the animal have free rein to go where it will from that point."

"By Harry! Why didn't we think of that?"

"Because it is so simple a plan, I suppose, sir," said Sam.

"No; because we were not Scorcher Sams, you mean," the chief disputed the point.

"Well, is that all, chief?"

"That is all. You have every point that I can give you; but you can go and see the horse and wagon, of course."

"I'll go at once."

"What we want, you see, is to get hold of the thieves; and if there is an organized band of them, as I begin to think now, we want evidence that will put them into our hands."

"All right; I'll do my level best, sir."

"That means something, then. But the matter you are already on—what is that?"

Sam gave an outline of it, and presently took leave of his superior to take up the new task that had been assigned to him.

"Well, now for it," he said, as he mounted his "bike" and rode away. "This is a nut to crack, sure enough; and if that horse fails me I'll be as much at sea as the other fellows."

In due time he reached the place where the horse was stabled.

He had called at the station first, and a sergeant had come with him to the stable.

"There is the beast," said the sergeant, indicating the horse.

"The mischief!" exclaimed Sam.

"What's the matter?"

"It is a better-looking horse than I expected to see."

The animal was certainly a fine one, sleek and well cared for and in prime condition.

"Better than the wagon, a good deal," said the sergeant. "That was an old affair, though strong enough yet save in that weakest spot that gave way and let it down."

"Let me see that."

The sergeant led the way through the stable to a little yard in the rear, where the broken wagon stood.

It was just what the chief had claimed for it—an undertaker's wagon of the usual style. It had been newly painted, and the name and address were on it in neat gilt letters.

Sam noticed that an old address was still visible under the varnish and coach black, or fragments of it; but it was useless to try to make it out, as the sergeant declared. The others had all tried it, he said, and failed. So Sam gave that up.

"You see, there is no clue," said the sergeant.

"So it looks, at any rate," Sam agreed.

"That being the case, what will you do about it?"

Sam mentioned his idea.

"By hokus!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Not a man of us thought of that, not one."

"I was forced to it as a last resort," said Sam. "Is there a wagon here that we can hitch to for the experiment?"

"Yes; I'll have the rig ready in five minutes."

"All right."

The sergeant was enthusiastic over the idea, and eager to put it to the test.

In a short time he was ready, and Sam, leaving his wheel there in the care of the stableman, he and the sergeant got into the wagon and drove off.

Once out on the Boulevard they drove along on the right hand side in the direction of the cemetery.

The horse was disinclined to walk, and went along at a swinging trot at good speed.

The two men were in disguise.

Sam had attached a beard to his face, and the sergeant had borrowed an old hat and coat of the stableman.

In due time they reached the cemetery, and on to the point where the wrecked wagon had been found, the lines lying slack on the horse's back and the two men talking.

The animal went straight on, as if it had never stopped at that point, and doubtless it never had before the occasion of the accident.

"Now for it," said the sergeant.

"Yes, and we shall discover something, too," assumed Sam.

"Why do you think so?"

"See the confidence with which the horse steps along."

"That's so."

"My opinion is," said Sam, "that the roundsman discovered the rig almost immediately after it had been deserted."

"Why do you think that?" inquired the sergeant.

"Because I believe the driver saw the roundsman first, and knew that his only hope for escape was to skip at once."

"There is something in that. It was noticed that the horse had apparently not been standing there a great while, and you may be exactly right in the matter."

"I feel sure that I am."

Thus they discussed the affair, while the horse kept up its regular speed, till finally it turned a corner without being guided.

The detective and the sergeant gave each other a look and nod and awaited impatiently for further developments, which were not a great while in coming.

Another corner was turned, the horse came to a walk, and at last drew in to the curb and stopped.

"Let's get right out, as if we have stopped purposely," said Sam.

This they did, and Sam patted the horse, while the sergeant pretended to be doing something about the wagon.

They were taking in the locality, and especially the place before which the horse had stopped, which was an old estate, with a very old mansion some distance back from the street.

"This is the place, not a doubt of it," said the sergeant in low tone.

"Not a doubt on my mind," agreed Sam.

"What shall we do now?"

"We'll get in again and give the horse the rein, and see what his next point of destination will be."

They were just getting into the wagon when a man appeared, coming down the walk from the mansion, and at sight of him Scorcher Sam could not repress a start. Was it his friend, Phil Dixon, or was it the man Dona Teresa so eagerly sought, Louis Murrill? That it was the one or the other he was sure.

CHAPTER XIII.

SPREADING THE DRAG-NET.

"Hello!" exclaimed the sergeant in a low tone. "We are in for it."

"So it seems," answered Sam; "and I am glad of it. This is the most fortunate thing that could have happened."

"Is that so? But what shall I do? Shall I drive on?"

"Not yet; wait. This is a man I have been looking for, and I am glad I am in disguise, for he will probably not recognize me. I'll ask him the way to some place or other."

The man had by this time come to the gate.

He leaned on the post and looked at the two men for a few moments, they giving him no attention, apparently.

Then Sam suddenly wheeled and faced him.

"Can you tell me where the institution for the blind is, sir?" he inquired.

"It is down about 165th and Ridge Road," was the reply. "You are a considerable distance out of your way here."

"I guess we are lost, sure enough," said Sam to his companion, loud enough for the other to hear. "You thought this house looked like it, but I was sure it wasn't."

"Guess you're right," said the sergeant.

"Much obliged to you, sir," said Sam, turning again to the man at the fence.

"Oh, you are welcome. You must be strangers in this part of the city, I take it."

"Yes; so we are."

"I thought so. Which way did you come?"

"Straight up Eleventh avenue, sir, from well down town. We must have passed the place."

"Yes; you should have turned at 165th street."

"Well, we'll go back and try it over again, that being the only thing we can do. Let her go, Gallagher!"

The last was to the sergeant, as Sam got in, and he said in low tones:

"Give the horse free rein, and see where it will go, no matter if the fellow is looking. I notice that he recognizes the horse anyhow."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it."

"Well, here goes. Gee up!"

The sergeant touched the horse with the end of the lines, and it sprang forward into a trot immediately, turning at the corner.

The Scorcher looked back as they turned the corner, and noticed that the man had left the yard and was walking leisurely down the street; but he was not deceived.

He believed that was only for a blind.

There was one thing he had noticed about the man, for he had taken a critical survey of him while standing at the curb.

The man had on an outing shirt, cut low at the neck, and Scorcher Sam had noted plainly a white scar like a seam across the throat, low down near the top of the breast bone.

He had found Louis Murrill!

But whether this was the man whom he had met at the McGee shanty or at Cactus Bill's show he was unable to decide.

"Well, what do you think?" inquired the sergeant.

"I believe that we have discovered the real nest," declared the detective.

"And what is to be done?"

"We must allay suspicion first."

"In what way?"

"That fellow has left the house to keep watch of us, by some means or other."

"For what purpose?"

"To decide whether we are fakes or not."

"And what will we do?"

"Go to the institution for the blind, straight."

"On what pretext?"

"Oh, I will make up something or other by the time we get there."

"But I thought we were to let the horse take its own course, and see where it would go."

"Too bad; but that will have to be deferred now. Let the horse have its head as long as it goes in the right direction. You can try it over again to-night from that point."

"All right; you are the boss."

"You see, if we allow the horse to go home now, watched as we are, or will be, it would give the alarm, and our birds would fly."

"That's so; and won't they fly anyhow?"

"We'll have to take the chances of that till we can put a shadower or two on that house."

The horse turned into the avenue and took them down the way they had come, and it required quite a pull to turn it in the direction of the asylum.

"The beast would take us straight home, not a doubt of it," said the detective.

"Yes, I believe it would; and I'm sorry we can't try it."

"You can have that to yourself, after dark, if I am not around to go with you."

"Then you want to go?"

"Certainly. However, if I am not on hand at the stables at nine o'clock do not wait for me, but go and learn what you can, quietly, and report at once to the chief."

"But you expect to be on hand?"

"If nothing prevents."

"All right."

In due time they came to the institution, and Scorcher Sam leaped lightly out of the cart and entered the grounds and proceeded to the house.

The door was opened to him, and he made some inquiry concerning something which he knew would not be understood, and could not be answered, yet which gave him the pretext for calling.

After a few moments' talk and an apology for bothering, Sam came away and entered the cart, and they drove off.

At a certain corner Sam got out.

It was understood that the sergeant was to drive some distance around and approach the stables from the side furthest from the station.

Sam reached the stables first, and, securing his wheel, he removed his disguise and made his exit by a rear way through some vacant lots to another street, and left the vicinity.

"Well, there is something accomplished," he said to himself. "Who would have thought that the two cases would dovetail like that? But, strange things happen in real life as well as in fiction, and I am not surprised at anything that occurs."

Taking it leisurely, Sam went up to the same neighborhood again, and came down by way of the old mansion to which attention had been drawn.

He surveyed the place carefully.

There was little sign of life about it. Any one at a casual glance would have said that the place was deserted.

On the gate and on the walk, however, as well as along the curb, indications to the contrary were present, and Sam believed that it was nothing more nor less than a place for concealing stolen goods.

In the rear, on the other street, a new house was in the course of construction, though work seemed to be going on at snail's pace.

There was no one to be seen in or around the old mansion.

Sam had stopped, as if to rest, some distance away, and had thrown himself on the grass under a tree.

Much of the ground in this neighborhood has remained untouched to this day, and is almost in its primitive state, as when the noble redmen of the woods were in possession.

There he remained until at last a couple of men sauntered up the avenue and began loitering in the neighborhood; then Sam prepared to go. He knew then the sergeant had reported and that men had been sent to pipe the place, and that these were they.

To make doubly sure he gave them a sign as he rode past them on his wheel, and the signal was answered. That settled the point, and he rode away, confident that even if the rascals took the alarm and sought other quarters his chief would be duly informed of their newer rendezvous. Being so satisfied, he sought Cactus Bill's Circus.

CHAPTER XIV.

WINNING A CONFIDENCE.

It was late in the afternoon.

The show had closed until the evening performance.

Inquiry for Cactus Bill proved that he was not there, but had gone out.

Those around could not say when he would return, but certainly before the time for the evening performance. If not, there would be no performance.

Sam inquired for Dona Teresa.

She was in her private tent in the rear

of the show tent, and it was said she had company.

The Scorcher had noted a ladies' wheel in the rack at the side of the tent, and had recognized it as Bessie Blake's, so he rightly guessed who the company was.

He asked to see Dona Teresa, and sent word who he was.

In a few minutes he was conducted to her tent, where she gave him greeting.

Bessie, the Boulevard Detective, was there, and Sam bowed to her, not offering to recognize her until he received a cue from her.

She rose almost at once.

"I will be going, Dona Teresa," she said. "I am very grateful to you for the talk about the Wild West you have given me, and I am sure it will work into a good story for my paper."

"Do not leave on my account, madam," urged Sam, motioning her to remain. "I shall be here only a few moments, and would be sorry to interrupt your evidently pleasant tete-a-tete. I would not have intruded upon the Dona, only that the proprietor is absent."

"I confess frankly that I am loath to go," admitted Bessie. "If you assure me, sir, that my presence—"

"Is entirely welcome to me; be seated again, I beg."

Bessie sat down.

The Scorcher knew that she had not accomplished her mission there, but was not ready to give it up.

"I will state my errand at once, lady," explained Sam, addressing Dona Teresa. "I have been so fortunate as to discover the man for whom you are in quest—"

"Louis Murrill?"

"The same."

"You are sure?" eagerly.

"There can be no mistake; I saw the scar on his neck."

"Where is he? Tell me where he is, and let me meet him face to face. I ask nothing else in life."

Her eyes were dilated, her fists clinched, and she had half started up from the chair on which she was seated, in the moment of excitement. She was eager.

"I cannot tell you that, at any rate not at present," said Sam. "I am afraid that you would do some desperate deed that would get you into trouble. We have laws here which, your cause for hatred being just and the man having done you a wrong, will undertake to move in your behalf."

"That for the law!" cried the young woman, with a snap of her fingers in disdain. "What satisfaction would it be for me to turn him over to the law? I must meet him face to face; I must deal with him with my own hands—do you understand?—with my own, own hands! I pray you tell me where to find him. Do not keep the knowledge from me, I implore." She was upon her feet, and she held out her clasped hands to Sam in supplication.

"No, no, it is impossible," said Sam. "Better that I should tell your brother, and let his judgment temper your impulse. I must again warn you to take care, for there are, as I told you before, two men who look very much alike, and you might possibly get the wrong one."

"There can be no mistake, if I see that scar."

"No, if you see that, as I did, there can be no mistake. But, you must not take the law into your own hands; I must not permit that if I can prevent it."

"At least, then, you will remain until my brother comes?"

"No, I cannot do that, but I will come again. You can tell him I have been successful. Permit me to say good-afternoon."

With that Sam bowed himself out and returned to his wheel, leaving Bessie Blake to take up the matter where he had dropped it, knowing that he had opened the subject well for her.

For a moment after he had gone, Dona Teresa was silent.

"No doubt you wonder what it is all about," she then observed to her visitor.

"I confess it has greatly awakened my curiosity," acknowledged Bessie, "but of course I do not expect you to take me into your confidence, a stranger."

"You are a woman, and—"

"And what, dear?"

"You can give true sympathy and advice. I so long to open my heart to some one."

"You have your brother—"

"Yes, yes, but men do not understand as women understand. And yet, you are a stranger to me. You would make a story of it all, as you call it, for your paper."

"No, believe me, dear, I would not—But do not confide in me; I do not ask it of you. And yet, I would like to offer you sympathy, too, for my heart has gone out to you strangely, since I first saw you. It seems as if you must be a sister of mine."

"You have spoken so kindly to me. Most of the women who visit our tent look down upon me because I belong to a show. We all must live, and this is my brother's way."

"It is as honorable a calling as my own, so long as you keep it honorable," said Bessie.

"That is the way I reason."

"Who was the gentleman who called?" Bessie asked.

It was plain that the young woman had not seen her and Sam together, although it might turn out that the brother had.

"He is of the police," answered the actress. "He was here early in the day when that man happened to enter the tent, and he prevented my brother from shooting him then."

"That would have been horrible."

"I thank him for it now, though I was angry enough at the time. My brother would be hanged, had he killed him, of course."

"Not a doubt of it."

"And I would not desire that, though I am willing to give my own life for the sake of a just revenge."

"You should not do that. That would be but small revenge, it seems to me, when the blow must surely recoil upon your own head. Better to invoke the law to your aid."

"And have it drag along till all patience is worn out, and then, perhaps, set the villain free—"

"It surely would not do that."

"Does it not do so more often than otherwise, when money is on the wrong side?"

"I hope you are wrong, at any rate."

"No, no, I cannot wait for the law; I must face him, and force the truth from his lips. Oh! if you could only know what I have suffered, and all because—"

"Hush, dear; perhaps your secret is too sacred to repeat."

"It is too sacred to be allowed to go unavenged. Oh! if he had but told me, so that I might go—"

"You would need your brother's arm as well as his head, my dear. He did right not to tell you. You must wait

and let your brother guide you with his judgment."

"And meantime that villain may escape me."

"I do not think so."

"Why?"

"Because, this man being of the police, as you have said, and you having gained his interest in your cause, he will take care of that."

"You think so? Then I am encouraged. Oh! if I thought he would escape me, and I could never strike the blow he deserves, I believe I would go mad—mad!"

"Dear one," said Bessie, "you have my sympathy. I believe I understand your cause for revenge. You gave him your love, and he consumed the freshness of the flower and cast it from him—"

"No, no! Good heavens, no! You wrong me in such a thought as that. Listen; now I must tell you the story."

CHAPTER XV.

SOMEWHAT COMPLICATED.

The Scorcher, meantime, had wheeled away in the direction of the McGee shanty.

Now that he had gotten on track of the man he was after, he felt it his duty to tell the Nightingale, so that she need not bother with him, or the other, should he come there again.

It was, altogether, one of the most peculiar cases he had ever undertaken to solve.

When he came in sight of the corner where the high fence was, he saw that some matter of excitement was attracting a crowd, and increased his speed and hastened to the scene.

Reaching the crowd, he leaped off his wheel and pressed in close to the fence until he came to where he commanded a view of the whole situation.

There were Cactus Bill, Molly McGee, and on the ground the fellow Dixon, as Sam took it to be, lying unconscious, while kneeling beside him was another man in bicycle costume.

Just behind Molly was her lover, Mike Murtha, Molly having just stepped in front of him, and as she pointed her index finger at Cactus Bill, she cried:

"Sure, it was you done et, ye bla'guard! Didn't Oi see ye wid yure two hands at dhe t'roat av him?"

"I say I did not do it," declared Cactus Bill, spiritedly.

"What is the trouble here?" demanded Scorcher Sam. "What is it, Miss Molly?"

"Sure, dhis gossoon has thried to kill a mon, and dhey would put dhe blame onto Mike, so dhey would, and he as innocent as Oi am mesel'!"

The man who was kneeling turned his face toward the Scorcher.

Sam started. It was the counterpart of the face that lay turned to the sky!

He had come upon both the men together, then, and he wondered which one of them had the scar on his throat?

"I believe the girl is right," this man declared, "I have reason to believe that she is right, because of something I happen to know in the matter. I want an officer."

"I am an officer," said Sam, showing his badge.

The man gave a start of surprise.

"Then I demand the arrest of this man, and I charge him with the attempted murder of my brother."

"Your brother?"

"Certainly; anything strange about that? Do not our faces reveal the fact? We are twins."

"I deny the charge, sir," declared Cac-

tus Bill. "I am entirely innocent of any hand in the affair—"

"Ye loie, ye spalpeen!" cried Molly, shaking her fist at him. "Did Oi not see ye wid yure two hands at his t'roat, as Oi said? Deny thot an' ye can!"

"I was looking for the mark," said the showman, speaking to the detective.

"And found it?" asked Sam.

"No."

"No! Then it must be on this other."

He laid a hand on the shoulder of the kneeling man, who rose to his feet immediately.

"What is all this nonsense about?" he demanded. "I demand the arrest of that fellow, for the attempted murder of my brother!"

"I want to see your throat, just under your sweater, sir," said Sam.

"My throat! You want to see my throat? What for?"

"I want to see the scar you have there. If you have such a scar, you, and not he, are my prisoner."

"Your prisoner—I? Man, are you crazy? Are you really an officer, as you claimed? I doubt it. Will some one here summon a policeman to my aid?"

"I am all the policeman you need, sir," said Sam, speaking severely. "Bare your throat, or I will place you under arrest and take a look at it by force. I am not crazy, neither am I fooling."

"Maybe not, but it strikes me you are a fool. There!"

With an angry motion, he bared his throat so that all present might see it.

It was as fair as a woman's, not a mar or mark of any kind upon it anywhere, and the Scorcher was for the moment nonplused.

"That settles it," he said, with a wave of the hand. "I was mistaken, that's all I beg your pardon, sir, and now I am ready to hear your complaint in full."

"Whom did you take me to be?"

"No matter, since you are not the man."

"But it does matter, and greatly, sir. It matters so much that it has probably cost my brother his life."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this: My brother told me of an adventure he had this afternoon—or was it this morning? No matter; he said he entered the tent of a showman at Fort George, and came near to being shot in mistake for another man against whom the showman evidently had a grudge."

"Do you think he is badly hurt?"

"You can see for yourself that he is unconscious."

"You had no hand in this, Cactus Bill?"

"I swear that I had no hand in it."

"And Oi say thot ye loie!" cried the Irish lass. "Oi saw ye wid yer fingers at dhe neck av him."

"Yes, opening the neck of his shirt to see if he was the man I want," answered the sport. "I did not harm him, but I have reason to believe that that young man did," and he indicated Mike Murtha.

"No, sor; Oi did not thot same," spoke up Mike.

"Av coorse ye did not," chimed in Molly. "The mon that says ye did tells a bould-faced loie, so dhere!"

"Let us get at this thing," said Scorcher Sam. "You, sir, try to bring your brother to, meantime. What reason, Cactus Bill, have you for thinking he did it?"

"Because, some one here—where is he now?—said he heard a quarrel inside the fence just before it happened, and when

he came around here this was what he saw, this man lying on the ground—"

"And you at his throat, the same as the girl says," spoke up a voice.

"Let us hear the rest of it," demanded Scorcher Sam. "How long were you in getting around to this side of the corner, after you heard the quarrel?"

"I did not come until I heard the voices around here and knew that something was up, sir; it couldn't been more than half a minute before you got here yourself, sir; I saw you when you came."

"And Molly, what have you got to say?"

"Sure, Oi have said it," cried the girl. "Oi say it was not me Mike done it at all at all."

"And what do you say, Mike?"

"Oi say dhe same, begob."

"The fellow had come again to see you, Molly?"

"Yis, and sure Oi was ownly doing phwat ye tould me to do, talk wid him, and while we wur a-talkin' in came Mike and wint fur him loike a tarrier goes fur a rat—but not sayin' me Mike is a tarrier, moind ye."

"And they had a fight?"

"Not at all at all. The man made his excuse and wint out in a hurry, and dhe next we knowed was all dhis great hullabaloo out here, and we came out to see phwat it meant."

"You came out at once?"

"To be sure."

"You did not even stop to explain to Mike?"

"Well, Oi did thot, but sure it took nor more nor a minute to do dhat."

"Here is a complication, sure enough," said Sam, speaking to the brother of the unconscious man. "You and this man, Cactus Bill, carry your brother into the yard, and I will disperse the crowd—Ha! here is a mounted officer; this is fortunate."

The injured man was taken in behind the fence, and Scorcher Sam, making an explanation to the mounted policeman, the latter dispersed the crowd, and that having been done, all concerned gathered inside the fence, where every effort was made to restore the injured man to consciousness. His bicycle, it was noticed, had been injured as if by a fall.

CHAPTER XVI.

TANGLED THREADS.

Scorcher Sam and Cactus Bill stood apart from the others.

The injured man's brother was doing all he could to restore him to consciousness.

It had been ascertained that he had no wound, so far as could be discovered, save a bruise on one side of his head, and there the bone did not appear to be broken.

A doctor had been sent for.

"What is your opinion of it all?" asked Cactus Bill.

"It is more complicated than ever, now," answered the detective. "I am half bewildered."

"And I am almost completely so. If neither of these has the mark on his throat what am I to think? That Dona Teresa is mistaken?"

"She was not mistaken," declared Sam.

"Not mistaken? How do you know that?"

"Because I saw the man and the mark both this very afternoon."

"And it was one of these? But no, that is impossible, unless—I give it up; I'm all at sea."

"Perhaps you meant to say, unless the scar is removable! That idea is in my own mind, and yet I do not see how

it can be. But it is either that way, or there are three who look alike."

"And these, we are told, are twin brothers."

"They look it."

"See; he is returning to consciousness."

"So he is. I want to be the first to speak to him, if his brother will permit me."

Scorcher Sam hastened forward and knelt beside the injured man, who was beginning to move his head and open his eyes a little.

"He is better?" Sam asked.

"I think he is coming to," was the reply.

"Will you allow me to speak to him first?" Sam requested.

"What do you want to do that for?"

"To satisfy myself on a certain point. His answer may clear at once the mystery of his accident."

"You call it an accident?"

"It may have been."

"I do not believe it."

"I think I can assure you that your suspicion against this man is wrong," meaning Cactus Bill.

"Well, I hope it is."

"Were you close to your brother when it happened?"

"No; I had met with a delay, and we were riding a block apart at the time."

"Ha! That proves one thing, then, at once. It was not he who was in here talking with this Irish girl, but must have been some one else."

"Why that is plain enough, isn't it?"

"It surely is."

The brother got up, and Scorcher Sam took his place.

In a moment more the injured man came to and looked up at Sam as he bent over him.

"Do you know me?" Sam asked.

"Yes; you are the man who chased me this morning. Was it your wheel?"

"Yes. Then you are the man who was in the tent and came near getting killed in mistake for another?"

"Yes; do you wonder I was in haste? I would have stolen the king's coach and six, if such a thing had been at hand at the moment. Your wheel would have been returned to you, of course."

"But I could not know that at the time."

"No, of course not."

"Well, about this accident—what do you remember about it?"

"Why, my brother and I were riding along this way—Where is he now? Oh, there you are, Edgar!"

"Yes, Anton."

"You see, we were riding this way, and I was in the lead. When I was passing here I took the sidewalk, seeing no one in sight and the road being none of the smoothest."

"I see it now," Sam interrupted, turning to Cactus Bill.

The man followed his look, started, and then got upon his feet.

"Don't be alarmed!" said Sam. "He understands the mistake that has been made. Go on with your story."

"I took the sidewalk, as I said," continued the man, "and just as I came opposite to this opening a man rushed out and collided with me, and over I went."

"And what became of the man?" asked Sam.

"I don't know; my light went out just then, so to say."

"Did you see him, Cactus Bill, when you came up?" turning to him.

"I saw several persons moving along the street. Maybe he was one of them."

"Not a doubt of it, to my mind," said Sam.

"But, would ye be sayin' dhat the two eyes av me head are no good?" demanded Molly McGee.

"You have made the same mistake that all of us have been making," answered Sam. "By the way, did you notice a scar on his neck, Molly?"

"Oi did not, then, sor. Sure, Oi was that excoited, wid havin' him here at all at all, and havin' Mike comin' and foindin' him here, dhat Oi don't know phwat Oi said to him, no more Oi do."

"Then you did not find out much about him?"

"Never a t'ing, sor."

"Well, it does not matter; for I have learned something myself. I was coming here on purpose to tell you not to bother with him, and also to let you know that I was unable to find Mike after I saw you. Molly is innocent in it all, Mike; blame me if anybody."

"Sure it is all roight, av you say so," answered Mike.

"But what is the meaning of it all?" inquired the brother named Edgar.

"Your brother has been mistaken for another person," said Scorcher Sam. "It might have led to serious complications but for this timely discovery."

"Then I am glad the discovery has been made."

"So am I. By the way, may I ask your names?"

"Edgar and Anton Hall."

"Do you know a man named Phil Dixon?"

"No, sir."

"Or one named Louis Murrill?"

"No."

"Do you, Anton, remember the man you met when you escaped me on Washington Bridge?"

"Yes."

"Did you take him to be your brother here?"

"Oh, no; don't you suppose I would know my own brother at sight, in broad daylight?"

"Did you notice him particularly?"

"Well, no."

"Did you notice that he looked like your brother, or like yourself, to come nearer?"

"I did look the second time at him, taking it to be Edgar at the first glance, but I immediately saw that it wasn't he."

"Well, of course you would note the difference quickly, but to others the three look so nearly alike that all this confusion has arisen out of that similarity."

"Lucky that it is settled, then."

"Yes, decidedly. Would you mind going up to the tent of this showman?"

"Is it safe?" asked Anton.

"Yes; he can go on ahead and prepare his sister for your coming, so that no accident will happen."

"All right, we'll go, if by so doing we can do any good and assure the people that we are not the man they want. For my part, I don't want another such call," said Anton.

CHAPTER XVII.

DONA TERESA'S STORY.

The Scorcher said a few words in private to Cactus Bill.

The sport went out ahead of the others, and took a cable car in the direction of his tent.

The others waited, while Anton Hall fully recovered his strength and adjusted his bicycle, after its rough usage, and then saying adieu to Molly McGee and her lover, they followed on their wheels.

When Sam arrived, Bessie Blake was just on the point of leaving, but seeing Sam she dismounted to speak to him.

"What have you learned?" Sam asked.

"The whole pitiful story," was the answer.

"And you think Louis Murrill deserves punishment?"

"Yes, if ever man did. It would be just to let Dona Teresa face him, Sam."

"Yes, but would it not be dangerous to her, if he is such a character as they give him credit for being?"

"Undoubtedly, unless first rendered harmless. You can do that, easily. Shall I give you the story now, or will you wait?"

"I will wait. You pedal down to Washington Bridge, and wait for me there. I'll probably not be detained very long here. See these two men coming, Bess?"

Sam had arrived a little ahead of the others.

Bessie looked in the direction indicated, and gave a start.

"Why, you have got the fellow already!" the Boulevard Detective exclaimed. "Which one is he?"

"Neither one is he," and explaining in a few words, he bade Bessie ride on.

She started as the others came up, and just then Cactus Bill appeared from his sister's private tent.

"Dona Teresa will see you, gentlemen," he announced. "Leave your wheels in the rack and follow me, if you please."

When they came to the tent the young woman met them at the door.

At sight of the brothers she gave a start and looked from one to the other in a puzzled manner.

"Which is the one you saw this morning?" asked Sam.

"I—I do not know," she admitted.

"Well, is either of these Louis Murrill?"

"No."

"How do you know?" asked Cactus Bill. "You have not looked for the scar."

"I do not believe that either of these gentlemen has the scar; now that I study their features calmly, I know that neither is Louis Murrill."

"That is true," assured Sam. "Neither one has the scar, as you say, and neither is the man you seek. I know where he is, however, and I hope to bring him to face you to-night."

"You will do that?" eagerly.

"Yes, or take you to see him, if my plans do not miscarry."

"That is all I ask; I will force the truth from him, for he cannot escape me, once I meet him."

"But, you will not be allowed to do him harm. As an officer, I will not allow that, you know. And, without me, you cannot hope to find him at all."

"That is true."

"Then you promise that you will not attempt—"

"No, no; impossible, impossible! You must prevent it, that is all."

"Very well; I will prevent it. He will have more crimes than one to answer for, it seems."

They took leave, and here, their parts having been played, we will allow the twin brothers to take leave of our readers as well.

The Scorcher went to rejoin Bessie Blake.

He found her on Washington Bridge, in one of the crenelles, hedged in by a couple of wheelmen.

They were standing leaning on their "bikes," laughing and talking, and Bessie looked distressed when Sam first caught sight of her, but her face instantly brightened at sight of him.

He rode up quickly, and the two young roughs made a move to go away, but Bessie ordered them to stay.

"Officer," she said to Sam, "I want you

to arrest these fellows for forcing their attentions upon me against my wishes. I will appear against them and press the charge."

"Not this evening, thank you," said one of them, and he was on his wheel and away instantly.

The other tried to follow, but, Bezzie laid a hand on his wheel and clapped a pistol under his nose.

"You stay right here!" she ordered.

He stayed!

Scorcher Sam had dismounted, but was on his wheel again immediately and after the fugitive.

It was a hot chase, but, before the chap could reach the other end of the bridge, Sam was up with him, and when he called on him to stop the fellow obeyed, and began to beg.

"No use," avowed Sam. "A few of you roughs up here want a lesson of this kind to bring you to time. Your conduct brings odium upon respectable wheelmen, and the sooner it is broken up the better. We'll put you where we put Don Quixote—"

"Scorcher Sam!" they exclaimed.

"At your service," from the detective, smiling.

"But, we have done no harm. We didn't know the lady—that it was a decoy—"

"The fact that you did not know her tells against you for forcing your unwelcome attentions upon her. Mount your wheels and come with us to the station."

They begged and argued, but of no use, and in due time they were in police custody.

That business done, Sam and Bessie sought supper.

They entered a nice, quiet hotel in the neighborhood, where Sam ordered a good repast.

"Now, Bicycle Bess," he said, when the viands had been spread before them, "I am ready for the story of Dona Teresa and Louis Murrill."

"You give me still another name, I see."

"Yes, and one that fits you well, too. You are the queen of wheelwomen, Bess."

"Nonsense! 'Blarney,' as your Nightingale would tell you. You can't compliment me that way, Sammy. I'll like you better if you won't try to flatter me."

"Well, I'll drop it, then. Now, the story."

"It is not a very long one."

"You can tell it all the more in detail, then. Was my suspicion in the matter right?"

"Nit."

"That so? But, fire away, Bonny Bess!"

"Fire something at your head? Well, give me your ears and here goes for it:

"Dona Teresa is seeking to avenge the wrong a sister of hers suffered at the hands of Louis Murrill. The fellow married her, but only to get her property, and finding he could not get that, became a brute to her.

"They had one child, now about six years old, if living, and at last he stole that from its mother, hoping by that means to force her to turn over certain papers to him. In the mean time she had transferred the property to her sister, Dona Teresa, and she had gone away from home.

"Well, grief for her child killed the mother in a short time, and she died on the day of Dona Teresa's return home. On her dying bed she made Teresa promise that she would hunt him down and avenge her death, and find and care for her boy. Teresa promised, and has been

seeking ever since, with Cactus Bill, so called, to assist her.

"Cactus Bill is not her brother, but they travel as brother and sister, and none of their companions know any better. He is, in fact, her lover, and they are engaged to be married, but she will not marry him until they have first discovered Louis Murrill and righted the wrong of Dona Inez—that being the sister's name, as a girl. Hence, you can understand Cactus Bill's eagerness to finish the quest and find the missing boy. That is all."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SCOOPING THE SCOUNDRELS.

Scorcher Sam was an attentive listener. He complimented his aide upon her success, saying he knew she would accomplish it.

"But, this child," he questioned. "Has it any identifying mark by which it can be recognized? If not, we may still have trouble."

"Yes, there is a mark. It has a birthmark, a red stain, as it were, in the shape of a pear, that involves the right temple. There can be no mistaking the child, once seen."

"Good enough. That gives us a cinch on the rascal by which we may be able to force him to terms, if he does not yield to the pressure brought upon him by Dona Teresa. By the way, you go up and spend the evening with her, till you hear from me."

"What for?"

Sam briefly explained.

They finished their meal. Sam settled the score and they passed out.

Sam saw his aide off in the direction of the showman's tent, while he, watching her ride away, with something of tenderness in his eyes, set out for the police station where he had the appointment with the sergeant.

The sergeant was not there, but Sam left word for him and took a run up to the old mansion to see how the two "pipers" were making out there. He found one on duty, the other having gone to supper, and from him he learned that the man had not yet returned to the house. Sam began to fear that perhaps the birds had flown, but in a short time he would know.

Telling the man to keep up a tireless vigil, he returned to the station, where he now found the sergeant awaiting him. The sergeant was ready for the adventure, and suggested that they ought to take another man or two along with them. This was Sam's idea, too, so two besides themselves prepared for the trip, and just about dark they set forth from the stable with the horse and a wagon that would carry them all.

Going to the place where they had that afternoon turned the horse in the direction of the institution for the blind, they there turned about and gave the horse free rein and a touch of the whip. The horse was a good one, as we have seen, and it was off at once. They did not once lift a line to guide it, but allowed it to take its own course, which the beast did, unhesitatingly, and at last it came to its destination and stopped before a rather imposing house with ample grounds and a stable in the rear.

The horse had turned in and stopped with its head at the driveway gates.

"Here we are!" announced the Scorcher. "No mistake, I guess."

"It looks so."

A policeman happened along at the moment.

Sam stopped him, and getting out of the wagon, had a short conversation with

him, with the result that the policeman took charge of the horse and wagon, while Sam and his companions entered the grounds.

Two of the men passed around to the rear, so as to intercept any who might try to escape in that direction, in case of alarm, while Sam and the sergeant went to the front door.

A servant answered the summons, and Sam inquired for the master of the house. His name was asked, but Sam did not give any, merely telling the servant that his business was of great importance and urging haste. The servant eyed him, and went off.

In a few moments a man appeared, and, to Sam's surprise, he recognized the man immediately. It was the same John Henry Doolittle with whom he had had the tiff that day! Sam being in disguise, was not recognized in turn, and the man quietly inquired what he wanted. At the same time he surveyed him searchingly.

"I understand that you have lost a valuable horse, sir," said Sam.

As quick as a flash the man produced a whistle and raised it to his lips, but before he could sound the note, Sam jerked his hand away and clapped a pistol to his head.

"None of that!" he commanded. "I see you were quick to tumble, but you were not quick enough for that trick. One word above a whisper, and I will blow your head off! The handcuffs, sergeant!"

They were applied in a trice, and the man was a prisoner.

At that moment the servant appeared, and with a bound Sam had him, too, and his silence was enforced while he was quickly tied, hands and feet. It had all taken place in a few brief moments, without a sound that could alarm any one else in the house. Sam sent the sergeant out to bring in the other men, and one of them was placed guard over the prisoners.

Sam and the others passed down to the basement floor then, and more servants were there arrested, and all the doors were securely locked to prevent any escapes. These prisoners, too, being left in the hall, Sam led the way to the floor above, and just as they approached a door, the door opened and a woman looked out. It was Mrs. Doolittle.

The Scorcher immediately informed her what was wanted. He knew he was making no mistake; and the fact that the horse had brought him straight there, and the fact that Doolittle had tried to give an alarm, were enough.

A boy appeared at the door, while Sam stood there in the act of arresting the woman, and Sam noted a red mark on his temple! There was no doubting the identity; it must be the child for which Dona Teresa was so eagerly searching.

Barely that discovery made, when another man appeared from the other side of the hall—none other than Louis Murrill! He was quick to take in the situation, but the police sergeant was quicker, and had hold of him, a pistol at his head, before he had time to draw back or get a weapon in hand himself.

It had been a surprise and capture complete.

The prisoners all having been secured, the house was further searched, but no others were found, and Sam dispatched to the nearest police station for additional assistance. Not only that, but he sent in haste for Cactus Bill and the two young women to come immediately.

The police arrived first, and were placed in charge of the house, and in due time the others came and—

Dona Teresa and Louis Murrill were brought face to face!

There was no mistaking the man; there was the white scar on his throat in witness of his identity!

At first the girl could not speak, but her breast heaved.

Then she broke forth, in scathing reproach, accusing him of the death of her sister and demanding the child.

The villain smiled at her, and that wrought the girl's passion to a fury. She snatched a keen knife from her bosom and sprang at him, but she was caught and held back.

"Not that! not that!" protested Scorcher Sam. "That would be but poor revenge. You want your liberty for the child's sake. Here, look and see if you recognize this bright-eyed little fellow," with a wave of the hand to where the child was standing.

At a sign one of his men had brought the boy in. With a cry, the girl ran forward and clasped the surprised little one to her breast, showering kisses and tears upon its face!

There was no doubting the identity of the child. She spoke to it in Spanish, and it understood; she mentioned its dead mother's name, and it smiled.

Telling her and Cactus Bill to take the child, for the present, Sam saw his prisoners properly incarcerated.

That done, he set out with a force of police for the old mansion on Washington Heights.

Arriving there, the house was quietly surrounded, and the capture of three other rascals was effected and a great discovery made.

The place was one that had been long used as a storing place for stolen goods. Here they were packed for shipment, and, from the new house in the rear, of which mention has been made, they were sent forth from time to time in boxes that were taken to be carpenters' tool-chests. The building of the new house had been but a blind to serve the deeper business!

The gang was completely broken up, and all concerned in it were sent up for good long terms. Those who were not captured that night were taken soon after, and hardly one escaped the general scoop.

Cactus Bill and Dona Teresa were soon wed, and Scorcher Sam and Bicycle Bess stood up with them on that happy occasion. They retired from the show business at once, and, with the boy they had recovered, soon departed for Mexico.

Not long after there was another wedding to which Sam and Bess were invited, and which they attended, namely, that of Mike Murtha and Molly McGee. Needless to say it was as grand a one as any bride could desire. Mike had prepared a home for his bride, and the voice of the Nightingale is no longer heard out on St. Nicholas avenue.

One of these days there will doubtless be another wedding, for everything appears to be pointing in that direction. To mention the parties concerned is unnecessary.

THE END.

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